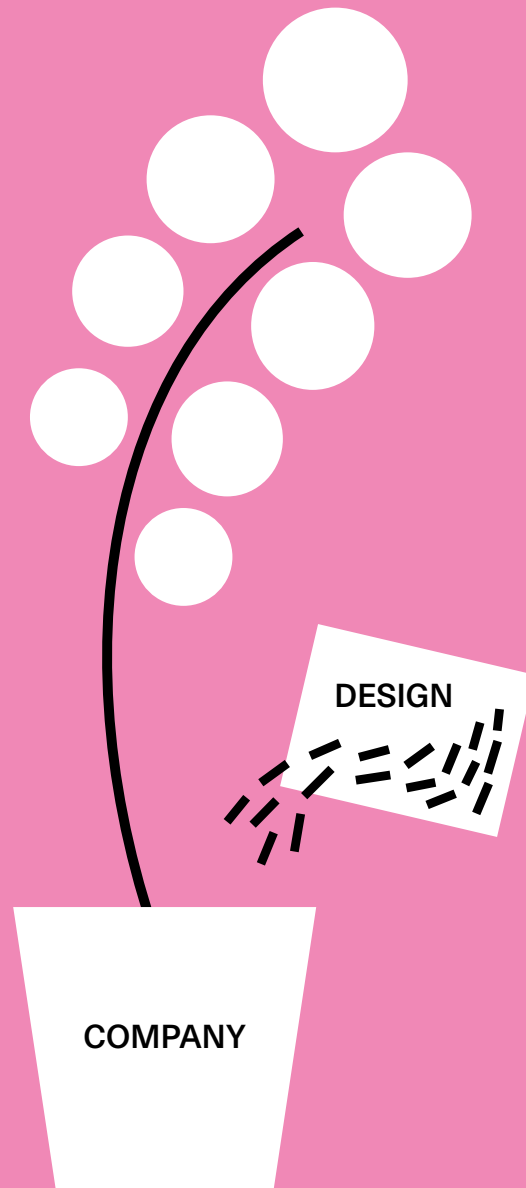
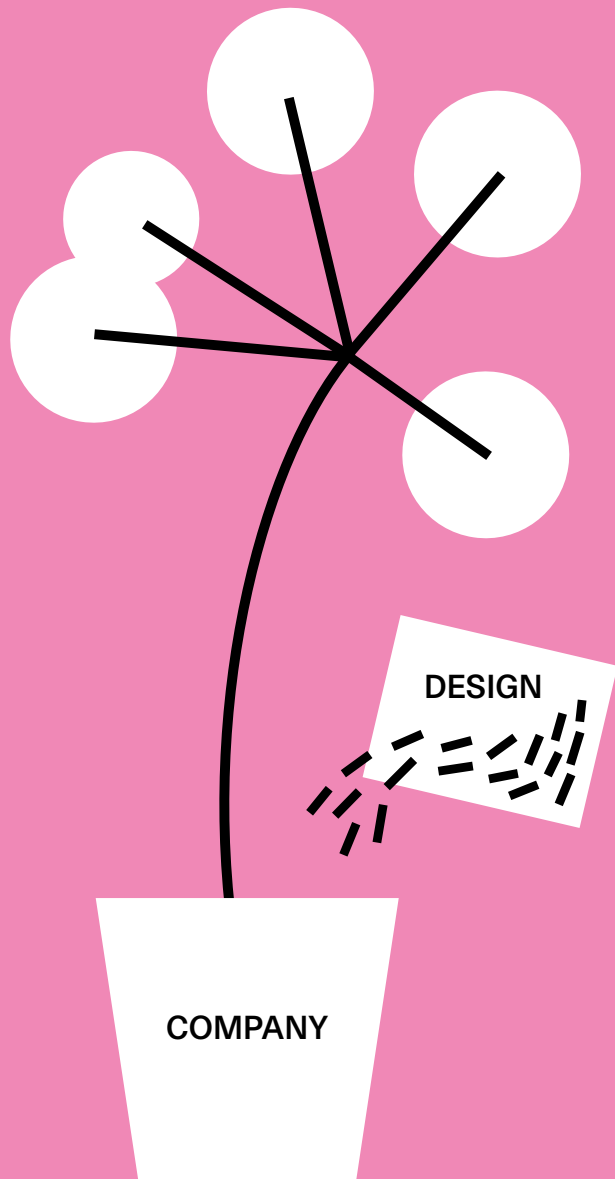
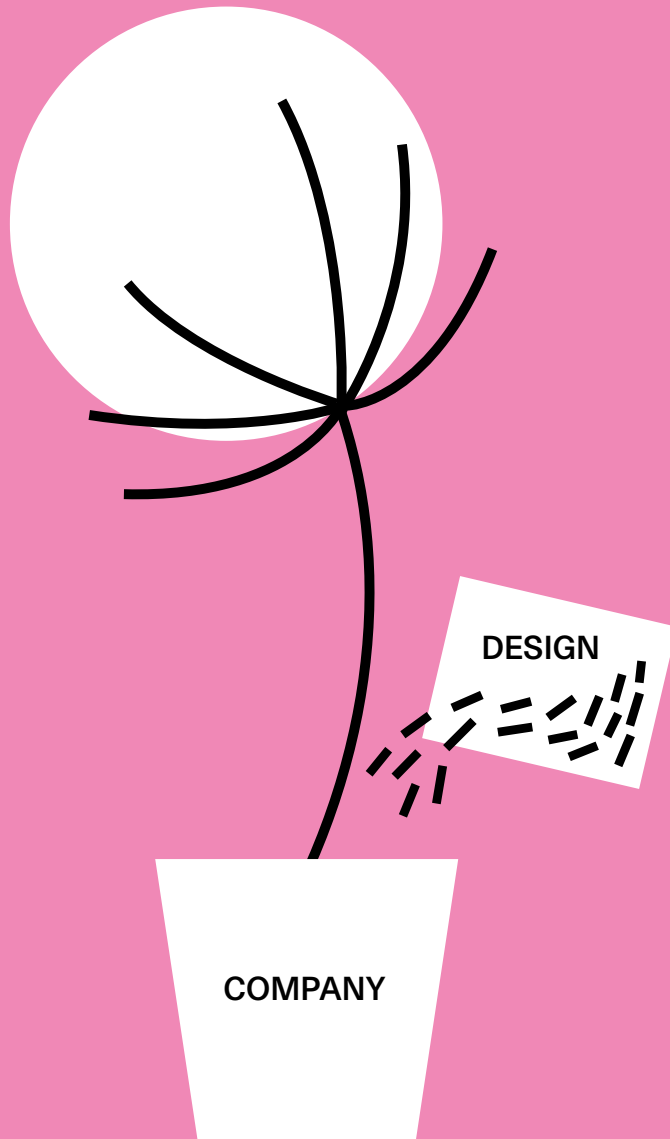


DESIGN





NINE STANDARDS OF DESIGN USE IN ORGANI- SATIONS



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INTRODUC- TION

The report “*The design economy in the Valencian Community*” undertaken by the Association of Designers of the Valencian Community (ADCV) in 2018, set out among its objectives the identification of the various avenues in which design interposes itself and is related to business management. To this end, in addition to carrying out quantitative research with more than 1,300 companies, a qualitative analysis was performed using case studies. A total of thirty examples of organisations from diverse economic sectors, geographical locations and business sizes.

The analysis of the information obtained through interviews with those thirty companies resulted in the development of two unheard-of tools. Both allow for a new interpretation of how companies integrate and manage design, facilitating a lateral approach in this regard to the Danish *Design Ladder* (2001).

The first tool, the Design Compass, focuses on an organisation’s initial motivation when incorporating design. The second tool, Design Use Standards, is based on the identification of a series of recurrent and common behaviours in companies which use design. The classification of these standards has the advantage of showing not only the motivating factors for the introduction of design, but likewise the

main uses and benefits of design within the company.

WHY A REVIEW AND VALIDATION OF DESIGN USE STANDARDS?

Five years have elapsed since the creation of this tool, which initially arose by chance as it was not contemplated in the original objectives of the study that originated it. Nevertheless, upon detecting that the tool contained relevant information to foster competitiveness and innovation in organisations, the ADCV decided to work on its development.

Since the release of the first version of the tool, we, at the ADCV have been aware that the design use standards had higher potential than they had offered so far. For this reason, it was proposed to review, explore and analyse the possibility of other standards. This entire process has been formulated in a methodological and thorough manner through the Design Impact Observatory, *Oid!* (its acronym in Spanish), in order to provide companies with relevant and verified information for appropriate decision-making in the strategic use of design.

Research has been carried out based on primary sources to further explore the knowledge and experience of the use of

design by organisations in the Valencian Community. The study, financed by the Valencian Innovation Agency, was conceived, supervised and managed by a strategic advisory team made up of experts with different profiles. The execution of the qualitative field study was carried out by a researcher specialised in business anthropology.

The result of the study has come to fruition in two methods. Firstly, the D-ToolBox, the business self-diagnostic tool available online on the oidobservatorio.com website, has been updated and expanded. Secondly, this publication has been produced in the hope that its content will be of great value for improving the management of organisations and contributing to increases of their productivity.

METHODOLOGY

This study has adopted a qualitative technique in order to comprehensively understand the design related phenomena and its impact on business competitiveness. Qualitative research has been tailored towards collecting and analysing non-numerical data extracted from in-person interviews to test the proposed hypotheses. This has made it possible to explore the quality and diversity of experiences and to decipher complex meanings and contexts.

The research process was conducted in four key stages:

1. **Research design, sampling and recruitment:** The process commenced with a comprehensive search to identify more than a hundred companies in the Valencian Community likely to be part of the research. After this pre-selection and a detailed analysis through secondary information, stratified criteria were applied which enabled the classification of a representative sample of 30 companies.
2. **Qualitative fieldwork:** Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with company managers in the Valencian Community, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives and practices in design.
3. **Coding and analysis:** Data analysis was divided into two parts: a comparative qualitative analysis to validate standards and discover new findings, and a narrative qualitative analysis to create meaningful stories from the interviews.
4. **Results:** This methodology has enabled research that allows us to decipher and interpret existing behaviours in the use of design made by organisations in the Valencia Community. The results of the study, which are taken into consideration in this publication and compiled in

the digital tool D-ToolBox, contribute to a thorough and enriching understanding of the interaction between design and business competitiveness, reflecting the diversity and dimension of its use in Valencian organisations.

RESEARCH SAMPLING

The group of organisations which make up the sample for this research comprises thirty companies in the Valencian Community. The selection of the sample was undertaken according to different criteria with the objective of ensuring a significant representation of the business ecosystem of the Valencian Community. These criteria include sector segmentation, company size, province and business model.

This multi-criteria stratified sampling ensures that the results and conclusions of the study adequately reflect the complexity and variety of design approaches and their relationship to business competitiveness in the region.

- **Profiling:** The research was carried out through in-person interviews with company representatives with responsible positions related to the management and leadership of the organisations. The objective of this approach was to obtain a comprehensive vision of the use of

design in the organisation's strategy. The diversity of profiles consulted provides a multidisciplinary perspective which enriches the understanding of the relationship between design and business management.

- **Sectors:** Sector segmentation has created the opportunity to cover a diverse range of business activities, from manufacturing to services, in order to capture the diversity of uses of design in various contexts.

The sectors analysed were equipment, agri-food, interior design, construction, furniture, printing, publishing, health, machinery, tools, footwear, textile, cultural services, logistics, banking, technology.

- **Company size:** Company size was considered as a sampling criterion, including both small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as larger organisations. This has enabled the examination of possible differences in the application of the design according to the scale of the organisation.

The classification according to the size of the company was assessed considering the organisation's total turnover in the 2022 financial year. Twelve small organisations (less than 10 million Euros turnover), nine medium-sized organisations (between 10 and 50 million Euros turno-

ver) and nine large organisations (above 50 million Euros turnover) were analysed.

- **Geographical location:** Geographical location has been another essential criterion to obtain the regional and cultural particularities of the different provinces of the Valencia Community given the fact that, as demonstrated during the research, companies can be influenced by their local environments. The distribution of the sample according to province was six organisations from Alicante, three from Castellon and twenty-one from Valencia.
- **Business model:** The business model was considered a relevant factor for understanding the various forms in which design can have an impact depending on the type of company. Seventeen organisations with a B2B model (business-to-business orientation), five B2C (business to end consumer orientation) and eight B2B and B2C (both business-to-business orientation companies and business to end consumer orientation) were interviewed.

ORGANISA- TIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH

ACIERTA RETAIL

- aciertaretail.com
 - Bruno Arnau
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-

ACTIU

- actiu.com
 - Soledat Berbegal
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ALTADIA

- altadiagroup.com
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ANDREU WORLD

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- emuca.es
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-

TEJAS BORJA

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 - Andrés Casanova
Managing Director
-

URBÀNIMA

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Managing Director and Founder
-

VONDOM

- vondom.com
 - Pedro Llinares
Marketing Director
-

ZETA BEER

- zetabeer.com
 - Guillermo Lagardera
Communications Manager
-

ZEUS SMART VISUAL DATA

- zeus.vision
 - Amparo García y Paula Mármol
Chief Operating Officer and Design Director
-

ZUMEX

- zumex.com
 - José González
Innovation Director
-

OVERALL THESIS

DESIGN STORIES: BEYOND SUCCESS

Both the strategic dimension of design and design management are not new terms. As early as 1965, the Royal Society of Arts in London founded the Presidential Awards for Design Management, while the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers created the Design Management Group in 1981. Only a few years later, in 1984, Philip Kotler and Alexander Rath defended in an article the need to consider design as a strategic tool⁽¹⁾.

Behind these two concepts lies a very basic idea which, somehow or other formulated, has always been present: design should not be seen as a final stage limited to the appearance of manufactured products, but rather can be incorporated from the earliest stages of any product or service development, and furthermore, it can be extended, in a coordinated manner, to all demonstrations of the organisation's activity, from corporate identity to user experience.

The idea that design is a much more effective tool if it is managed strategically has therefore been around for some time.

(1) Philip Kotler, G. Alexander Rath. *Design: A Powerful But Neglected Strategic Tool*. Journal of Business Strategy. 1984

In 2001, the Danish Design Centre encapsulated this philosophy into a relatively simple scale, called the *Design Ladder*, to qualify the degree of approximation to this ideal. The four steps of the design ladder range from non-systematic use of design to strategic design, and have been widely used to study the degree of design implementation in different territories and as a measure of success for various design policies.

In this highly successful and rarely answered paradigm, any organisation is encouraged to move up the ladder, progressively taking design to a position at the highest level of management. One of the most frequently used resources for the dissemination of this approach are case studies, in which examples of success are shown, generally corresponding to companies of a certain size or belonging to sectors with a high design culture.

In the research carried out for the report "*The design economy in the Valencian Community*" by the ADCV in 2018, 30 case studies representative of the economy of our territory were prepared, cases in which small and medium-sized companies and sectors with little contact with the culture of design predominate. These examples, some of which are far removed the typical

success stories, nevertheless disclosed internal stories or modest histories of successes and errors in which design plays a fundamental role. Far from wishing to showcase a single narrative of overarching success, these stories contain valuable insights as regards as to how organisations that, eventually, may not fit into the paradigm of strategic design management can benefit from design.

It became evident from the content of these case studies that what is called design use standards: standards and guidelines which appear recurrently in the companies' stories but rather are verbalised and expressed in a variety of ways.

These findings illustrate a range of tactics where design takes centre stage, rather than being limited to the ideal model of design use at a strategic level. A set of uses that is closer to the specific situations and requirements of any company and is feasible for the majority, although this fact has rarely been documented in the common success stories.

Their other great quality is that the findings more realistically reflect the relationship between design and success: the standards demonstrate clear interdependencies and highlight the importance of

considering the entire context of the organisation prior to acting in a specific manner. Every design action can lead to success, although not all of these are successful, as not all success stories are underpinned by good design decisions. This will depend on the other factors and constraints of the organisation which will affect the successful attainment of its objectives.

Furthermore, the stories included in that study demonstrate how standards do not function as watertight compartments or one-way roads. These standards appear in companies at different points in their development, and change throughout their lifetime, and several can coexist in the same period of time. These adapt to the company's strategy or guide it.

Strategy and tactics are generally presented under a hierarchical view in which strategy is an expression of formal, planned objectives, obtained through the subordinate means of tactics. Yet this relationship has some issues and can be conceived differently, blurring the boundaries or fostering tactical action as an effective form of response and problem solving(2).

(2) David Mackay, Mike Zundel. *Recovering the Divide: A Review of Strategy and Tactics in Business and Management*. International Journal of Management Reviews. 2016

The finding of the standards is a quite significant fact and likewise a review, validation and extension with further research is required. In the present study, the standards described and illustrated demonstrate that design, in addition to being a powerful strategic ally in organisations, is a tactical tool provider which can be employed in a planned and coordinated manner without the need to be subordinated to a predetermined strategic approach.

The use standards, as contemplated in this study, arise from analysing new design stories and identifying these tactical uses and their results. By focusing on the small scale, we show a more tangible relationship between action and effect, and come closer to the everyday needs of the majority of entrepreneurs. Finally, by not associating the use of design with guaranteed success, the importance of contextualising tactical actions in a conscious and coherent strategy is reinforced.

THE NINE STANDARDS

THE NINE DESIGN USE STANDARDS

This research substantiates the presence in companies in the Valencian Community of nine standards which represent a set of design uses intended at fostering the success of organisations. These are not isolated characteristics of a business model, but rather represent dynamic design skills designed to serve and optimise corporate performance.

The standards deviate from static and absolute conceptions, constructing a list of opportunities for design use which, at certain points, intertwine, converge or overlap, demonstrating their flexibility and adaptability to the changing needs of organisations.

Another distinctive aspect of these standards lies in their ability to answer the question: “What can design be used for?”. It is not merely a question of understanding why design is used, but rather accurately understanding the purpose and specific utility it can bring to an organisation.

Its relevance lies in facilitating an understanding of the impact of design on the structure and behaviours of an organisation, as well as opening new strategies of disseminating design and prompting its application through innovative methods. This,

therefore, addresses the existing dilemma as regards design in the field of management: it is generally recognised as beneficial, but its implementation is hindered by a lack of understanding or appreciation.

Furthermore, these standards perform the function of giving visibility to corporate practices which involve design that are not always consciously carried out, and leaving their strategic potential unnoticed. The identification of the nine standards contributes to providing insight into the powers of design in various organisational contexts.

THE NINE DESIGN USE STANDARDS: DEFINITIONS

1. **Design for product/service differentiation.** This use of design defines a competitive differentiation strategy. Design adds value to create unique and distinctive products or services.
2. **Design to position the organisation.** Design is used as part of the company's positioning strategy. This use of design, influencing the brand, enables the world to see the organisation as it wishes to be seen, and confers a competitive edge over the competition.
3. **Design to address a situational problem.** Design contributes to resolving a circumstantial problem of the company. In its

history, the company meets an obstacle which threatens its survival. In cases such as this, the company identifies in design the solution which enables survival and continued progress.

4. **Design to generate innovation.** Innovation, whether technological or non-technological, follows design. It is because there is design in the organisation which requires the generation of new ideas and solutions. Design is the engine of innovation and sweeps along with it all other activities without this implying a heavy investment in R&D.
5. **Design to adapt to different contexts.** Faced with a global, diverse and segmented scenario, organisations are required to adapt their offer to the cultural, social and economic differences of the markets in which these operate. Design, as a tool focused on end-users, has the methodology and the answers to carry out these changes.
6. **Design for achieving excellence.** Design helps the company in its unwavering pursuit of excellence. Design intervenes as an essential ally in the pursuit of the highest quality in all aspects of the organisation.
7. **Design to provide meaning and coherence to the organisation.** Throughout the organisation's history, it has devel-

oped capabilities, products or messages which are not always related to each other. Design enables visualising the structure and give meaning to the whole.

8. **Design to integrate new challenges, visions and purposes.** Our societies experience perpetual changes of values and face new challenges. Design acts as a powerful agent for change in organisations facing volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments, aligning strategy, products and services with emerging social demands.
9. **Design to be a reference benchmark organisation.** There are organisations which through their activity disseminate a design culture to their competitors, clients and suppliers. There are others which have been influenced in this way. Both situations produce significant changes in the way organisations behave and perceive themselves.

STANDARD 1

DESIGN FOR
PRODUCT/
SERVICE DIF-
FERENTIATION

Design is a strategic tool for product and services differentiation. Beyond its aesthetic function, design brings significant value, capable of transforming the ordinary into the exceptional and the conventional into extraordinary.

This section explores how design, in its various forms, contributes to creating unique offerings which stand out in the market. From product design to communication or process design, every aspect of the company can be intervened by design as part of a competitive differentiation strategy.

PRODUCT DESIGN AS A FACTOR OF DIFFERENTIATION

Product design emerges as a cornerstone of a company's differentiation strategy. In a market saturated with options, where consumers or users are faced with an overwhelming variety of products and services, design is presented as a constitutive element of uniqueness. Evidence of this is that almost all the organisations interviewed in this research have adopted differentiation strategies based on design, substantiating its power as a competitive factor. One example is offered by Emuca, a company dedicated to the design of furniture hardware and components:

“For Emuca, product design is key because, currently, it is the element which provides the most differentiation. It enables us to increase brand awareness, introduce more sustainability into the company, increase margins and distinguish ourselves from generic products. Clients are seeking suppliers to help them improve through innovative products, and to achieve this, design is essential”. (Santiago Palop. Emuca).

This underlines that any company, in any productive sector, is capable of designing an adequate product design strategy.

Media Vaca publishing house underpins its strategy on the specialisation of its publications, both for their illustrations as well as the innovation and consideration of their content and format, and having an editorial criterion based on knowledge, all things considered, as its managers specify, of good work.

“We value the relationship between content and aspects in our books. We seek to ensure high quality in reproduction and binding, allowing the book to last over time without deteriorating. Nevertheless, we do not consider this consideration as a luxury, but rather as a fundamental part of our good practices to meet demanding

quality standards”. (Vicente Ferrer and Begoña Lobo. Media Vaca).

Another example is the case of Vondom, a company specialising in furniture, where an item as common as a planter could be transformed through design. The key is to understand design not only as a formal solution but similarly as a conceptual and strategic solution which redefines the user’s experience and the functionality of the product. Its interpretation of the iconic planter segment through the prism of design has challenged the traditional perception of this item.

“Historically, planters have been considered generic industrial products, by no means considered unique pieces, so our impact was significant. We used design to develop a unique line of planters with a singular presence and aesthetic, but with functional advantages such as interior lighting or self-irrigation”. (Pedro Llinares. Vondom).

A case in point is that of Vondom when it comes to understanding how design can completely redefine the functionality and use of a product. Nevertheless, these innovations are quite often misunderstood by certain agents:

“When we started promoting our products in magazines, the media could not understand the concept. After all, there was ‘designer’ furniture, ‘designer’ lighting, but ‘designer’ planters?”. (Pedro Llinares. Vondom).

Currently, thanks to its commitment to product design, Vondom is one of the leading furniture companies in the country and a reference benchmark in design internationally.

Product design, beyond the aesthetic, acts as a critical differentiator, enhancing the brand’s identity and strengthening its position in the market. It is a key element which fuels innovation, increases perceived value and distinguishes companies in a highly competitive environment.

Zeus Smart Visual Data is another company which has distinguished itself by prioritising differentiation through product design, in this case, digital products. Its specialisation in the design of data panels has enabled the company to consolidate itself in a business niche without significant competition.

“Through the design of data panels we help to understand information, simplify it and make better decisions. And today we have no competition in the market.

Nobody has managed to develop a solution like ours. And all due to design”. (Amparo García. Zeus Smart Visual Data).

This example underpins the importance of design in the creation of “blue oceans’, a concept which refers to the generation of entirely new markets and segments. Through design, companies can discover unmet needs and offer completely innovative solutions.

DIFFERENTIATION BY VERBALISING DESIGN IN COMMUNICATION

Despite the enormous importance of product design in differentiation strategies, simply having a good product is not enough. One must likewise know how to make that product known. And here, once again, design acts as a lever of added value, facilitating effective communication and strengthening the perception of the product in the market.

A case in point of this issue is that of Sanycces. Although the company had managed in designing a unique and high-quality product, it experienced difficulties in making that product known. It was the design which enabled the company to stand out from its competitors and obtain better results.

“We realised that something was not working properly when we noticed that clients were very surprised when receiving our product. It was unexpected and they had not received adequate information. From that moment on, we changed our communication strategy, designing the message so that it was aligned with the reality of our product”. (Blanca Serrano. Sanycces).

In fact, it is interesting to note how certain companies opt for a strategy of differentiation through communication instead of focusing on the product. Such is the case of Cárnicas Serrano, whose marketing director shares a critical approach towards the traditional concept of differentiation:

“I am somewhat critical of the classic concept that product differentiation is required so as to be competitive. There are various companies with similar product portfolios, and each has its own clients. The challenge is more about mental availability, being known and unique. In this aspect, design plays a fundamental role”. (Álex Salvador. Cárnicas Serrano).

This view, which underlines the importance of mental availability, that is, the cognitive associations derived from the relationship between brand and public,

is widespread in the food sector, where a wide variety of similar products compete on a shelf for the attention of consumers:

“If we had not opted for design, I don't know what would have become of Cárnicas Serrano today in a scenario where the business is utterly dependent on self-service products, on modern distribution”.

In the same vein, we can find the company Zeta Beer, dedicated to the production of craft beers. In a segment with such a wide and diverse offer, communicative design becomes a powerful ally to stand out from other brands and add value which enables increased commercial margins:

“If you're going to brew a beer that costs above average, spend time on design; create something that makes those beer drinkers feel that they are rewarding the effort made. We want people to perceive that we've cared so much about what's inside the beer as we are about its external presentation”. (Guillermo Lagardera. Zeta Beer).

To achieve effective differentiation, it is essential that product design goes hand in hand with the design of a communication strategy. An appropriate integration

of design in the value proposition not only improves the perception of the product, but likewise strengthens the identity and presence of the brand in the consumer's mind.

This synergy between design and communication is essential to stand out in a competitive market, where differentiation goes far beyond the product itself and extends to how it is presented and perceived in the market.

PROCESS DESIGN AS A FACTOR OF DIFFERENTIATION

As already mentioned, the strategy of innovation in product design is a constant in any organisation that wishes to differentiate itself from its competitors. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all companies have a physical or digital product to offer and are more focused on service design. So how can these companies differentiate themselves?

One of the most representative cases is that of Acierta Retail, a company specialising in the design and installation of commercial spaces, such as shop windows and pop ups. Acierta has consolidated its position in the market through an innovative approach to process design.

This approach has been fundamental in their differentiation strategy, enabling the

company not only to meet their clients' requirements efficiently, but likewise to maintain high quality and coherence in all their projects:

“We build loyalty thanks to the consistency of our processes. Our consistent track record reinforces the trust of clients who know the reliability of our process design. Clients are aware of our ability to respond quickly with a very short time frame”. (Bruno Arnau. Acierta Retail).

This ability of Acierta Retail to efficiently manage projects ensures fast and reliable deliveries, and likewise reinforces the perception of the company as reliable and competent in its field. Process design, in this case, goes far beyond simple operational management; it becomes a cornerstone of its corporate identity and a distinctive element.

Efficient process design is not only an operational component, but likewise a strategic element which fosters differentiation and success in the competitive world of services.

HOW TO DESIGN TO POSITION PRODUCTS OR SERVICES?

1. **Commitment to product design as a differentiating factor.** Consider product

design not only as an aesthetic matter but as a key strategic differentiator. Regardless of the sector in which the organisation operates, product design can be used to stand out in a competitive market, increasing the perceived value of your offer.

2. **Align product design with communication strategy.** Having an excellent and unique product is only part of success; the effective communication of its value is likewise essential. Design is able to act on both aspects and both improve the perception of the product and strengthen the brand identity. Design ensures that the product is unique, and at the same time, recognised and valued by consumers.
3. **Design effective processes to achieve differentiation.** Value process design as a key differentiator, specifically in companies where the tangible product is not the only focus, as in the case of services. A professionally and efficiently designed process not only ensures the delivery of high-quality services, it can likewise define the company's reliability and competence, strengthening its position in the market.

STANDARD 2

DESIGN TO
POSITION THE
ORGANISATION

Design, integrated into the corporate positioning strategy, plays a key role in influencing brand perception. This design practice enables the world to see the organisation as it is and how it wishes to be to be seen, and confers a significant competitive edge.

Organisations whose positioning is based on strong brands not only compete more effectively, but likewise tend to be more profitable, resilient and long-lasting than their competitors.

Through the brand, companies connect with people and create value for both themselves and society. This brand must be based on a distinctive strategy and identity that differentiates the company from its competitors. To create the brand strategy and identity, it is essential to have the design to obtain a coherent positioning, capable of conveying the corporate purpose and connecting with the public through its own language.

THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN POSITIONING

Design emerges as an essential element for the strategic positioning of an organisation given the fact that it has a considerable impact on brand identity. It acts as a silent representative which enables the brand to communicate its values and highlight its strengths, creating a distinctive and desirable perception in the market.

“The impact of design for us is absolutely fundamental. It has been our main competitive advantage in positioning ourselves. Any company can manufacture soothers or bottles correctly, but to do so by combining health with beauty, with trend, through design, only Suavinex”. (Sara Muñoz. Suavinex Group).

The ability of design to raise brand recognition strengthens a company’s ability to expand its horizons and markets. The transition from a local brand to a global brand requires a clear and recognisable positioning, where design becomes a game-changer.

“One of the main values of design is the creation of brand awareness. This affords one the opportunity, for example, to open doors to international markets. Without a defined positioning and brand recognition, it is very difficult to compete against those which have been established in those markets for three decades”. (Santiago Palop. Emuca).

Design is presented as a versatile and powerful tool, essential for the positioning of a company. Thanks to its ability to differentiate and confer identity, strengthen brand recognition and break into new markets, design plays a critical role in chang-

ing the perception and experience of an organisation. Its strategic and deliberate use not only redefines a company’s image, but likewise confers a significant advantage in a competitive and constantly changing market.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DESIGN AND STRATEGY

As already mentioned, design is a critical factor in the positioning of companies. It is that element which should play a decisive role in defining the set of meanings that the organisation requires so that people identify its products, services and the entity itself. Its effectiveness depends on its comprehensive inclusion in the corporate strategy, preventing same from being an isolated or secondary element. The interaction between design and corporate strategy is a complex and highly important relationship which determines the success, growth and development of an organisation.

This intertwining of design with the company underlines its function beyond the merely aesthetic and positions same at the centre of decision-making.

“Design is a catalyst, a method which enables all the company’s innovation to be channelled. All things considered, it

is a strategy that makes it possible to align your product with your philosophy, your principles and your culture". (Jesús Llinares. Andreu World).

For design to act as a catalyst for corporate strategy and accurately reflect the organisation's mission and vision in the market, it is essential that there is a good understanding between those who design and those who manage the organisation itself. The most effective design is based on an honest, mutually trustworthy professional relationship, working together between the design team and the organisation. To that end, this requires detailing and sharing all the information required to address the challenge.

"Design must be at the service of the company's reality, and to attain this, the company needs to have self-awareness. There are no universal design solutions. Marketing or general management must understand what the reality of their company is and work with the design accordingly". (Álex Salvador. Cárnicas Serrano).

In the context of corporate strategy, it is essential that design is managed from senior management and implemented by design professionals.

"Design is highly strategic and operates effectively when it is closely related to the brand and corporate strategy. It is not a question of whether the design is liked or not; it must respond to a strategic briefing and the results are those which will determine whether the design is appropriate or not". (Sara Muñoz. Suavinex Group).

For design to successfully attain the objectives set by organisations, it must be incorporated into the higher echelons of corporate management, actively participating in the formulation of strategies and decision-making. This requires design to be adjusted to the company's current situation in the market and to focus on the attainment of specific and measurable results with which to verify its effectiveness.

CLIENT-CENTRED POSITIONING

Client-centricity stands out as one of the most effective and widely adopted positioning strategies, as recognised by the majority of the companies participating in this study. This strategy entails positioning the client or user at the centre of all the company's operations and strategic decisions. Its objective is to thoroughly understand the needs of the target audience and to develop innovative solutions which effectively meet those needs.

In this context, design, whose purpose per se is to respond to people's needs or problems, becomes the ideal instrument to implement these client-centred strategies, assisting companies to differentiate themselves and offer added value to their market. One of the many examples is EBIR Bathroom Lighting.

“If our client is looking for a mirror with specific details, we provide advice and offer all aspects of the design, such as the thickness of the frame or the lighting design. From the client's requirements, we develop design solutions and continuously verify these with the client's participation”. (Raúl Ribé. EBIR Bathroom Lighting).

Adopting a client-centred strategy means prioritising client requirements and experiences over short-term financial results. This approach underscores the value of long-term user satisfaction, even if it means recognising and rectifying errors in the design process.

“We make recommendations to our clients based on a commitment to their requirements and well-being. If it is considered that any of our designs will not meet those requirements, we suggest

an alternative to the client. For us, the most important thing is to think about our users, never stipulate a product without addressing their requirements”. (Pedro Llinares. Vondom).

Elsewhere, it is important to understand that the philosophy of client-centricity transcends the direct relationship with clients to likewise encompass the end users of the product or service. It is essential to consider those who will eventually use the product, as their experience and satisfaction are critical to fostering trust in the brand. This approach often leads companies to collaborate closely with their clients in a participatory design process:

“Our understanding of design is about how we relate to our clients. We have designed a work model which is based on both our trend studies and the knowledge provided by our clients. This enables us to co-create and position ourselves in the market in a specialised manner”. (Irene Moreno. Importaco).

Applying design to address problems with a client-centred approach in mind often leads to the development of innovative and successful products. The key is to thoroughly understand the needs of end

users, generating a competitive advantage and positioning a company uniquely in the market. This philosophy is reflected in Zumex's experience.

“We have patented and launched onto the market the first professional commercial juicer that cleans itself, so that people who use the juicer do not have to disassemble the juicer. This innovation responds to the identification of a need of the machine users. In this way, we make our clients' experience easier”. (José González. Zumex).

The client-centred strategy has established itself as a path to corporate success, based on the application of inherent design thinking and methodologies. This situation prioritises the satisfaction and needs of not only direct clients, but likewise extends to the “clients of our clients”, that is, the people who will eventually use the product or service. By maintaining this widened perspective and collaborating closely with clients, we can co-design and co-create to develop innovative and successful products, strengthening the company's position in the market.

HOW TO DESIGN TO POSITION THE ORGANISATION?

1. **Recognise design as a positioning engine.** Trust design as a key tool for positioning your company, which facilitates differentiation, brand creation, and entry into new markets.
2. **Integrate design into corporate strategy.** Ensure that the design is included at the apex of the corporate strategy, enabling an understanding of the current reality of the company and may help decision making. Aim for clear and measurable objectives and results.
3. **Foster a client-centred approach.** Use design to foster a people-centred strategy which prioritises long-term sustainability, as well as the co-creation of solutions that benefit the entire value chain, from direct clients to people who will eventually use the product or service.

STANDARD 3

DESIGN TO
ADDRESS A
SITUATIONAL
PROBLEM

Design can act as a decisive factor to overcome situational obstacles which threaten corporate survival. In critical moments, organisations find support in design to obtain creative and effective solutions.

The examples and scenarios presented in this section are based on interviews conducted, exemplifying how design can solve situational problems in companies. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the areas of design intervention are much broader and varied, extending beyond the specific cases mentioned.

Design, as a versatile tool, has the potential to address a variety of non-structural challenges in different business contexts. These may be changes in the availability of resources, technological or legislative or market evolution, among others.

DESIGN TO ADDRESS MARKET PROBLEMS

Organisations frequently face market challenges which threaten their continuity. A powerful tool to overcome these obstacles is design. By addressing market problems through design, companies not only survive but can likewise prosper, innovate and redefine their presence in their sector.

Impresum is a representative example of how design can be a lifeline in diffi-

cult times. Emerging from the ashes of a family-owned business, it faced a severe sectoral crisis in the 1990s. The decision to innovate by specialising their services specifically for the design field and, at the same time, applying specific design thinking strategies was key to its transformation.

“We were born out of a crisis in 1992, which led us to innovate. Moving from very industrial clients, with very long press runs, to incorporating technology which enabled us to make short print runs. That’s when the design studios arrived, requesting special projects. That connection was an immediate hit with us, and we commenced to specialise”. (Dani Matoses. Impresum Imprenta).

In addition to saving Impresum from the crisis, this shift towards design-oriented printing projects and the deepening in the sector’s working methodology managed to position the company as one of the ten most innovative printing houses in Spain. Impresum managed to turn a period of uncertainty into an opportunity to reinvent itself and prosper, thanks to combining design and technological innovation.

Another case in point is Actiu, a company which had to reinvent itself due to the 2008 economic crisis.

“In 2008, we underwent a major crisis. During that difficult period, office-centric projects became scarce, forcing us to explore other work environments. It was then that we discovered opportunities in airports, hospitals and universities, places where work activity continued”. (Sole-dat Berbegal. Actiu).

Actiu’s disposition towards design focused on emerging needs enabled the company to overcome a difficult period, adapting to changes in the market and expanding its scope. Today, Actiu is a leading company in the design of furniture for a variety of spaces internationally, with presence in over 90 countries. This success underscores how using design to explore new opportunities can enable a company to withstand and thrive in market crisis situations.

An additional example in this design use standard is the case of Inesfly. Originally known as Inespa, this company specialised in chemical products for the furniture industry. In the 1990s, competition from China in the international market affected the local industry in Spain. Faced with this challenge, Pilar Mateo, daughter of the founder, proposed a solution to address the crisis of the family-owned business. She set up a laboratory to develop new products, at

a time when few companies in Spain had faith in research.

“In a creative context designing alternative products in the company, Pilar Mateo focused her doctoral thesis on insect control through paints applied to walls. From this endeavour emerged Inesfly Corporation, pioneer in what we call “vaccines for homes”, an internationally patented biopolymer microencapsulation technology”. (Eduardo Castell. Inesfly Corporation).

The Impresum, Actiu and Inesfly statements demonstrate that design is an essential tool for solving business problems. Faced with situational challenges, creativity emerges as a comprehensive strategy which enables organisations to adapt, innovate and grow, offering alternatives to reinvent themselves and consolidate their position in the industry.

DESIGN TO ADDRESS PRODUCT PROBLEMS

Design likewise plays an essential role in addressing and solving specific challenges in project development. This design function is key to identifying and overcoming obstacles which may arise during the life

cycle of a product, enabling companies to adapt and prosper effectively in response to changing environmental issues.

The case of Hilaturas Ferre is a prime example of how design can contribute to the solution of cyclical problems which threaten the continuity of a company.

Hilaturas Ferre, a company with a legacy of innovation, faced a significant challenge when the shortage of virgin yarn fibre threatened its business. The solution found was to change the raw material of their production, opting for the recycling of textile waste.

“We were pioneers in addressing recycling issues 75 years ago. Back then, we did not do so for reasons of sustainability, but out of prevailing need for survival. The shortage of virgin yarn fibre led us to redesign alternatives based on textile waste recycling”. (Luis Pita. Hilaturas Ferre).

The decision solved the problem related to the difficulty of supply and, at the same time, opened up new avenues for the company. It enhanced Hilaturas Ferre’s good reputation in the industry, positioning itself as a leader in innovation, and over time, in sustainability. As market preferences changed, the company set a new standard

in the textile sector. An example of this is the obtainment of the National Fashion Industry Award in 2020.

This visibility demonstrates how design can be a strategic tool to address and overcome critical production challenges. Rather than backing down from difficulties, the company used design as a means to reinvent itself and adapt, finding a sustainable competitive advantage in the process.

By turning a problem into an advantage, adopting a design approach geared towards sustainability and innovation, companies can change threats into opportunities for long-term growth and success.

DESIGN TO ADDRESS COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

In challenging situational situations, designing effective communication is critical for companies and organisations. Not only does it make it easier to capture the attention and interest of the public, but it likewise manages to change the perception and increase the relevance of the organisation's offer.

L'Etno, the Valencian Museum of Ethnology, faced a significant challenge given the fact that its main claim lies not in the presence of renowned artists, but in a peculiar collection of everyday objects.

“We are an institution which has a collection with little social value. We do not have works by Rembrandt, Picasso, nor Roman treasures. Ours are common objects, similar to those that anyone can have in their home, very everyday elements that are part of daily life”. (Joan Seguí. L'Etno).

Furthermore, being a public museum, advertising options were limited, which further affected its visibility and number of visitors. In response to these challenges, L'Etno proposed an innovative option in its communication, opting for an identity design and quality in the exhibition posters.

“We decided to recuperate a classic element of the exhibitions: posters. We pulled out all stops so that each exhibition had a unique and exceptional poster. So, we commenced to generate a spectacular poster collection with distinctive elements such as typography or image. This initiative caught the attention of the people, who began to visit us not only for the exhibitions, but likewise to purchase the posters”. (Joan Seguí. L'Etno).

The incorporation of the design was extended to other areas of the museum. One of the most important changes was the

move away from a conventional exhibition design to another in which the scenography itself became the star. This solution attracted more local and foreign audiences. Many visitors commenced visiting the museum with the interest of taking a “selfie” with the exhibitions:

“Since we commenced holding such exhibitions, we have noticed a significant increase in the number of foreign visitors, especially Italians, who come solely for the excuse to take selfies in our exhibition. We would probably never be on one’s itinerary if it weren’t for the distinctive design of our exhibitions.”

The success of L’Etno exemplifies how intelligent and strategic design in communication can contribute to overcoming problems of positioning and connection with the public, turning the everyday into something worthy of attention and appreciation.

The commitment to differentiated and attractive communication and scenography enabled the L’Etno not only to survive, but to prosper, winning the award for the best European museum (European Museum of the Year Award) in 2023. A clear example of the power of design to address communication problems.

HOW TO USE DESIGN TO ADDRESS A SITUATIONAL PROBLEM?

1. **Evaluate the market and find new niches.** Identify market changes and tailor your product or service design to meet these new needs. Be flexible and act quickly as regards demands.
2. **Innovate in the design of products and services.** Use design to reimagine and improve your products. Design can solve problems of supply, functionality or relevance in the current market.
3. **Improve communication through design.** Use creative design strategies to improve your brand communication. Design can increase your organisation’s visibility and appeal, attracting new clients and markets.

STANDARD 4

DESIGN TO
GENERATE
INNOVATION

Innovation, including technological innovation, follows design. It is because there is design in the organisation which requires the generation of new ideas and solutions. Design is the engine of innovation and sweeps along with it all other activities without implying a heavy investment in R&D. Innovation transcends mere technology, it is sustained by research and is materialised through experimentation.

Next, we explore how design catalyses innovation, fusing creativity with practicality, and how leading companies adopt this approach to reinvent themselves and prosper in a constantly changing world.

INNOVATION IS NOT JUST A MATTER OF TECHNOLOGY

Innovation, often seen as synonymous with technological advances, is actually a much broader concept encompassing aspects such as product design, process design, relationships or communication. This more comprehensive view of innovation recognises that significant improvements and progress come not only from technology, but likewise from the way projects are conceived, presented and communicated.

Jeanologia is a representative example of how technology can merge with innovative design.

“Laser technology obviously already existed but what was not contemplated was its application to pants ageing. It all started when we started to look into how this technology could be applied”. (Fernando Cardona. Jeanologia).

This creative application of laser technology transformed the ageing process of jeans, demonstrating that innovation encompasses technology, concepts and processes.

Zumex exemplifies how design can complement and enhance technology. Design has fostered the technical evolution of the original juice juicer machine by incorporating modifications or improvements.

“Initially, industrial machines were developed, using stainless steel to ensure robustness. Nevertheless, new materials and finishes and an avant-garde aesthetic were introduced with design, in response to market demand. The constant premise has always been that the machines must be self explanatory, user friendly and with a comprehensive design, not only limited to an attractive front”. (José González. Zumex).

The strategic use of design to innovate enables organisations to respond effectively

to changes in the business environment. At the same time, design improves the functionality and acceptance of their technological products and services, responding to the practical and everyday needs of the users.

In the case of the Rolser company, manufacturer of shopping trolleys, innovation ensues from product design rather than technology:

“Since 1975 we have not changed the Plegamatic model. It has been redesigned but its innovative essence remains: a shopping trolley with a foldable structure”. (Vicent Server. Rolser).

In this example, innovation focuses on design functionality, demonstrating that practical solutions can be as innovative as any technological breakthrough.

Another avenue for innovation is that launched by Zeus Smart Visual Data, through the way information is presented to companies:

“We designed panels with the data which companies request, that likewise serve to empower teams. These panels provide real-time information as regards the performance of their area and do so in an attractive and dynamic manner”. (Amparo García. Zeus Smart Visual Data).

This innovation in data visualisation substantiates how well-managed, user-centred design has the power to change the way companies operate and make decisions.

Likewise, innovation in communication design represents another viable differentiating strategy. The case of Suavinex is representative of this, given the fact that it underscores the value of design in communication in the childcare sector:

“In our sector, we have the best design. We have a very distinctive overall brand look, product and communication thanks to our commitment and design capabilities. And this is, in large part, why we are leaders”. (Sara Muñoz. Suavinex Group).

Innovation goes far beyond technology; it is a multifaceted phenomenon which includes, among other things, product and process design as well as communication and strategy. By recognising and encompassing these activities as innovation-specific, companies can generate solutions and projects which are technologically advanced, intuitively designed and effectively communicated.

USER SERVICE AS KILOMETRE ZERO OF INNOVATION

When we mention the dynamic network of innovation, research and design we do so understanding that these are not isolated aspects, but strongly interconnected. The ability of a company to innovate is intrinsically related to its commitment to user service. It is through this symbiosis that the design acquires its highest potential, given the fact that, as pointed out in Standard Two, among its main purposes is to satisfy the people’s needs. Companies can discover, through different research techniques, not only current problems, weaknesses and wishes of their clients, but likewise anticipate future trends.

Internal and external research of user needs are key cornerstones in this process. On the one hand, internal research enables organisations to leverage their accumulated knowledge and experience to identify potential areas of innovation. This introspection not only discloses opportunities to improve and expand, but likewise provides a platform to reflect on how current market trends and industry dynamics can influence and shape future design. And on the other, external research provides an objective

and specialised perspective, essential to understanding the competitive environment and the expectations of consumers.

The interrelationship between research into the user needs, innovation and design is evident in companies such as Emuca, where client feedback is fundamental.

“The client is the boss. The information provided by the client, together with what technology can provide when analysing that data, is essential to move forward”. (Santiago Palop. Emuca).

Tejas Borja exemplifies the importance of closeness and proximity with clients and distributors to obtain valuable insights. The company approaches user service research as a continuous dialogue with those responsible for distribution.

“The distributor is the one who commences to guide us and propose change options. From there, we start to work and to determine whether or not it is possible to carry it out”. (Andrés Casanova. Tejas Borja).

At Rolser, research into user experience and brand perception becomes an annual ritual at trade fairs, where interaction with several user profiles provides essential insights for the future.

“We took advantage of the Frankfurt trade fair to talk with clients, suppliers and distributors, and asked them to share their vision of Rolser in the next two to three years”. (Vicent Server. Rolser).

Proactivity is essential to ensure that design and innovation are aligned with future market trends.

Importaco takes this research even further, integrating scientific methods to better understand consumer expectations.

“We use evaluation systems based on collaborative innovation to understand what the consumers expect from our products”. (Irene Moreno. Importaco).

This innovative approach not only underscores the interrelationship between user needs research, design and innovation, but likewise evinces how the introduction of new technologies and sciences can open revolutionary avenues for design.

Knowledge of user needs is the engine that drives innovation in design. By integrating this knowledge, organisations can create solutions to meet current needs, anticipate and shape the future. This three-dimensional process of research, innovation and design is essential to remain

competitive and relevant in a constantly changing market.

INNOVATION REQUIRES EXPERIMENTATION

In the field of design and innovation, experimentation is an irrefutable component which fosters creativity and discovery. Experimentation is the bridge connecting research and innovation, enabling abstract ideas to be transformed into tangible and innovative solutions.

It is a process of exploration, where risk, error and continuous iteration are fundamental to the development of products and services which break molds, challenge traditional limitations and establish new paradigms.

The intrinsically experimental nature of design is reflected in the philosophy of Cuadernos Rubio.

“It is a process which entails continuously testing new products until market acceptance is achieved”. (Enrique Rubio. Cuadernos Rubio).

This perspective underlines the importance of trial and error as a methodology for discovering new possibilities in a continuous cycle of learning and adaptation.

According to the founders of Media Vaca, the publishing house prompts its authors to explore, which shows that not setting limits to what is established, asking questions and seeking new experiences can be a catalyst for creativity and originality.

“Our working model is based on dialogue. We look for authors with whom we have a relationship and with whom we can have conversations with about what we are interested in telling through our books. This is why our editing process takes a long time, as these conversations can go on for years”. (Vicente Ferrer and Begoña Lobo. Media Vaca)

Acierta Retail approaches experimentation with a flexible and adaptable mindset.

“In our company, we are guided by a trial and error approach. We constantly evaluate whether what we’re doing is the best or can be improved. If the ideas work, great. If they don’t work, we look for other alternatives”. (Bruno Arnau. Acierta Retail).

This philosophy underscores the importance of being a dynamic organisation willing to change and adapt ideas, maintaining

an open and receptive attitude to new possibilities. A situation which represents a healthy disconnection from set ideas, enabling innovation to flow freely.

For Jeanologia, experimentation has resulted in unexpected discoveries:

“Many successes stem from a mistake. Specifically, the design of our ozone washing process originated from an error in a garment that reminded us of the stonewashed effect. After that, we performed many tests to be able to perfect and overcome it”. (Fernando Cardona. Jeanologia).

This anecdote highlights how failures can be camouflaged opportunities, leading to innovations which might otherwise not have been discovered.

Hilaturas Ferre stands out for working on the interrelation between design, innovation and sales in the manufacture of yarns:

“To innovate it is necessary, first, to design something. From that design comes innovation. Then, it will be decisive to evaluate how the market accepts that innovation”. (Luis Pita. Hilaturas Ferre).

Experimentation at any stage of project design is essential to attaining innovation. It

is a process of continuous discovery where research, creativity and analysis of alternatives are intertwined to create solutions that, in addition to meeting current needs, open up new avenues and possibilities for the future.

Experimentation through design is not just a technique; it is a philosophy which inspires companies to be pioneers, to explore the unknown and to turn challenges into innovation opportunities.

HOW TO DESIGN TO GENERATE INNOVATION?

1. **Foster innovation beyond technology.** Prompt your organisation to see innovation not only as technological advances, but likewise as what the design of products, services and communication strategies is capable of improving and reinventing. This includes exploring new avenues to present information and working visually on brand identity.
2. **Foster user research.** Foster a culture of continuous research of people’s needs which relates design with the need to innovate. Prompt your team to seek guidance in effective analysis of experiences, likewise from other sectors or markets, to anticipate future trends and needs and apply these learnings in design.

3. **Prioritise experimentation in the design process.** Foster a design approach which values experimentation and learning through trial and error. This entails testing new ideas and concepts. And similarly, have the ability to adapt and modify designs in response to feedback from experiences, maintaining a flexible mindset and open to continuous innovation.

STANDARD 5

DESIGN TO
ADAPT TO
DIFFERENT
CONTEXTS

In the current global scenario, international organisations face the challenge of adapting their products and services to the varied cultures, societies and economies of the markets where these operate.

The need for adjustment requires a design direction which is sensitive and responsive to these differences, addressing both aesthetic as well as functional and contextual aspects.

This use of design enables organisations to create relevant and resonating solutions taking into account the particularities of various audiences in a global, diverse and segmented scenario. This ensures that products and services meet the expectations of each market and are harmoniously integrated into the cultural and social fabric.

CULTURAL ADAPTATION FOR EXPORT

In an increasingly globalised and diverse world, organisations wishing to internationalise must address the challenge of adapting their offering to the cultural, social and economic differences of the destination markets. Design becomes an essential tool to respond to these variations and ensure success in multiple contexts.

One of the keys to the successful adaptation of products or services to international

markets is a thorough understanding of local preferences and needs.

“It is necessary to understand and know the needs of clients, dive into the market and observe what these are like, what their tastes are. Whether on the other side of the world or even within the same country it is essential to understand the idiosyncrasies of each place”. (Begoña Baigorri. Altadia).

This detailed understanding of regional differences is essential for design to develop in line with the cultural preferences and expectations of the target market.

Likewise, aligning product offerings with territorial trends and preferences is equally important:

“The selection of products displayed in a region should be aligned with that particular demand. For example, sending solid colours to California would be unsuitable, as market trends in that region are geared towards high added value exotic natural stones such as Italian marbles or Brazilian granites”. (David Bueno. Neolith).

Furthermore, the suitability of products concerns aesthetic aspects and may also

include specific functionalities according to the regulations and required needs:

“In each country we have encountered specific demands; for example, in the USA, ceramic pieces designed to prevent the entry of birds were sought, while in Portugal particular designs for roof tiles due to specific regulations were required”. (Andrés Casanova. Tejas Borja).

Finally, it is important to stress that cultural adaptation does not exclusively affect the design of the product or solution, it likewise affects the way in which design will be communicated:

“Knowing the consumer is key, as markets vary significantly. Some are more conservative than others and therefore adaptation in design, colours and communication is essential”. (Sara Muñoz. Suavinex Group).

Adaptation to the cultural, social and legislative differences of international markets is a complex process which requires a thorough understanding and a flexible and sensitive design capacity.

Successful companies in this regard are those which manage to balance brand coherence with adaptability, ensuring that

their products and solutions are relevant and desirable in a global, diverse and segmented scenario.

ADAPTATION TO PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

When seeking to develop solutions according to different ergonomics and physical and environmental environments it is essential to have the design to customise offers which meet the specific needs and conditions of each type of target profile.

The design considers factors such as variations in height, strength and mobility of users, as well as specific climatic and environmental conditions to ensure that the products are not only functional and convenient, but likewise durable and efficient in their specific environment.

This adaptability improves the experience of who will use the product or service, and increases the relevance and acceptance of the product in various markets.

Rolser, a pioneer in the manufacture of shopping trolleys, exemplifies the importance of adapting products to the physical, ergonomic and environmental differences of each target group.

An exceptional performance of this adaptation can be seen in the method of production chosen for the Japanese market:

“In Japan we designed trolleys with a set height, approximately 10 to 15 centimetres lower than the national models, considering that the average height there is lower”. (Vicent Server. Rolser).

This customisation ensures that the trolleys are ergonomically comfortable for Japanese users, demonstrating sensitivity to physical differences between populations.

Furthermore, Rolser has adapted to the specific environmental conditions of other markets such as Canada.

“In Canada, due to the use of salt on roads to combat snow, we developed more durable coatings to prevent corrosion”.

Rolser’s ability to adjust its designs according to the ergonomic and environmental needs of different groups of consumers or users is a clear indication of its consumer or user centred orientation and on the physical particularities of each market.

Another representative example is that of Inesfly, an innovative biotechnology company. Its work creating paints incorporating microencapsulated biocides for the control of insect vectors of diseases reflects a unique adaptability to the challenges related to the global environment:

“The diversity of regulations, resistances and insect types varies by country. Therefore, it is necessary to define the design of different products according to current regulations, the vector to be addressed and the specific resistance of insects in each region”. (Eduardo Castell. Inesfly Corporation).

Inesfly’s success is evidenced in its ability to solve specific problems in different regions, from the control of Chagas in Bolivia to the management of malaria and leishmaniasis in Africa and Asia. The company has managed to overcome the challenges posed by the varied natural and physical conditions worldwide, adapting the design and communication of its products.

PRODUCT ADAPTATION TO SUPPLY CHAINS

A case which demonstrates how the product can be adapted to supply chains is that of Laboratorios Calduch. This pharmacy specialising in lip balms uses design to expand its presence in the international market. A notable example of this adaptation occurred in its foray into the Chinese market:

“In China, the main market is online. The product was shipped via courier and then distributed around Beijing in packages delivered by couriers, which sometimes caused the product to leak and affect its presentation. To address this problem, we had to design a lid which would protect the product”. (Vicente Calduch. Calduch Laboratorios).

This challenge exemplifies the importance of considering transport and storage conditions when designing products for export.

The lid designed for Laboratorios Calduch not only solved the problem of the aesthetics of the product during transport, but likewise guaranteed its integrity and quality when reaching the final consumer.

HOW TO DESIGN TO ADAPT TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS?

1. **Research and understand local markets.** To ensure that products are relevant and attractive, it is essential to research and have a thorough understanding of the cultural, social and economic differences of each market. Concern yourself about understanding the local consumers and

take into account their specific preferences to create designs to authentically connect with that audience.

2. **Adapt the product aesthetically and functionally.** Adapt the aesthetics and functionality of your offer to meet the trends and regulations of each region. This will not only improve product relevance in specific markets, but will likewise ensure compliance with local standards and expectations.
3. **Design with supply chains in mind.** Develop a flexible design perspective which can be adapted to various contexts and the specificities of supply chains. Consider how variations in transport or storage can affect product integrity and presentation.

STANDARD 6

**DESIGN FOR
ACHIEVING
EXCELLENCE**

In any corporate environment, success is sought although this attainment is not always evaluated solely in terms of economic benefit. Even when financial performance is prioritised, it is inevitable to take into account the method in which that benefit is obtained, resulting in the concept of excellence. Beyond sales figures or results, certain organisations aspire to transcend mere economic success, pursuing perfection in every aspect of their activity and in the impact they generate.

The use of design to achieve excellence is embodied as a precise tactic in today's business environment. Organisations seek to transcend mere aesthetics and imbue every aspect of their structure with quality, from culture to strategy and operations.

Design excellence is a dynamic and continuous process which furthers organisations to constantly innovate and adapt. By integrating design in all their areas, these manage to improve their products and services, while enriching their corporate identity and positioning as leaders in their respective sectors.

EXCELLENCE AS A VISION

At the core of corporate strategy, excellence is presented not as a final destination, but as a continuous journey towards an

ever-expanding horizon. This perspective, intrinsically related to design, rejects the idea of a definitive point of arrival and welcomes, instead, the notion of a perpetual improvement.

In this paradigm, design enables reaching stages towards a utopia of excellence which always entails the desire for self-improvement. This tireless pursuit of perfection embodies itself in a process of self-expectation and innovative renewal led by design.

Design becomes a declaration of intent, an affirmation that there is always room for improvement, to be more efficient, more sustainable, more resonant with the needs and desires of users or consumers.

“One of our mottos is to grow, to evolve and once we reach the objective, to start again. We can’t stop. We have to reinvent ourselves, we have to progress, to grow, and when we have achieved all this, we start again with something”. (Vicent Server. Rolser).

It is a mindset which challenges the status quo, constantly prompting organisations to scale new heights, new ways of thinking, and new solutions to old and emerging problems. In this journey towards excellence, each product, each

project, each decision-making becomes, through the use of design, an opportunity to learn, adapt and improve. Excellence is measured both by current successes and by the ability to evolve and respond to future challenges.

“Working towards excellence makes one self-disciplined, this is helped by the continuous improvement we have implemented in the company”. (Soledat Berbegal. Actiu).

This conviction evinces a commitment to improving operational and strategic processes where design becomes a mindset which permeates corporate strategy and culture.

EXCELLENCE EMBRACES THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

The use of design to achieve corporate excellence contemplates a narrative which is woven both the present and the future. It is not simply a question of creating solutions that solve current problems, but rather forging a path which contemplates and anticipates the challenges and needs of tomorrow. This broad design vision evinces a thorough understanding that the true value and sustainability of solutions lies in

their ability to remain relevant and effective over time.

On this journey towards lasting design, excellence becomes a constant dialogue between the present and the future. This provision is based on the idea that design is a dynamic and adaptable process, capable of evolving along with changing market trends, emerging technologies, social challenges and the behaviours of users and consumers.

“We do not associate the design philosophy with the short term or the merely timely or imminent solution. We understand it as an aid to improve the environment where people live today, tomorrow and the day after”. (Soledat Berbegal. Actiu).

This statement underscores the importance of using the ability of design to read the present and project into the future, combining experience and knowledge with foresight and innovation. The companies which achieve this balance are those that, beyond mere survival, manage to prosper and succeed in adapting to changes and leading solutions which set the direction of their respective industries.

Likewise, acting prospectively carries inherently responsibility. The use of design

in management towards excellence allows for a control of the ecological and social impacts, ensuring that today’s solutions do not become the problems of tomorrow.

“Our premises are innovation, quality and sustainability of the company. These are the three fundamental cornerstones on which everything we do is based: products, processes, strategies...” (Vicent Server. Rolser).

The use of design to achieve excellence encompasses a vision which transcends the present context to address the future. This vision requires a combination of creativity, innovation, foresight and responsibility. In reconciling these elements, solutions are created which not only solve today’s challenges, but likewise pave the way for a more sustainable, innovative and humanly enriching future.

EXCELLENCE REQUIRES INCORPORATING DESIGN THROUGHOUT THE ORGANISATION

The pursuit of excellence in the business environment goes beyond the mere creation of aesthetically attractive products or services and lies in the very essence of the organisation.

This holistic approach finds in design the way to verbalise excellence in all management areas: from strategy and processes to organisational culture and social and corporate interactions. In doing so, design becomes a catalyst for innovation and continuous improvement, redefining every aspect of business operation.

“Design enables channelling all the company’s innovation, thereby becoming a fundamental strategy. We opted for this strategy as it leads us to the creation of world-class products in line with our philosophy, principles and business culture”. (Jesús Llinares. Andreu World).

This statement encapsulates the idea that every department, every team, and every person in the organisation must agree on a design vision focused on excellence. It is not simply a matter of improving products, but rather it’s about changing the way one thinks, works and interacts internally and externally.

Structuring design at all levels of the organisation implies a commitment to innovation in both what is created and how it is created. It entails rethinking processes to make design more efficient, sustainable and aligned with corporate values. It means that strategic decisions are adopted taking

into account the commercial viability, the aesthetic and functional part, and the environmental impact and satisfaction of people, both those who work in the organisation and those who are users or consumers. This global design philosophy enables companies not only to respond to market needs, but likewise to be a leader in creating and setting industry trends and standards.

“The most important intangible of a company is design, and in our case it is the backbone of our culture. We’ve always kept it in mind, keeping it at the centre. This has contributed significantly to the prestige of Zumex, consolidating us with international recognition”. (José González. Zumex).

Furthermore, the integration of design into corporate culture fosters an environment where creativity and innovation prosper. It enables anyone in the organisation, from the CEO to the newly incorporated person, to contribute ideas and solutions which enhance excellence. This design culture is essential to building an organisation that is both a leader in its field as well as resilient and adaptable to market changes and consumer demands.

All things considered, excellence is a multidimensional journey which requires

the integration of design into all aspects of an organisation. In doing so, companies can attain commercial success, innovation, sustainability and positive social impact.

HOW TO DESIGN FOR ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE?

1. **Adopt a mindset of continuous improvement.** Consider design not only in terms of products or communication, but likewise in decision making as a key facilitator in corporate strategy and culture.
2. **Look towards the future. Use design to anticipate.** prepare, and prevent potential changes and challenges. Ensure that products and services remain relevant and sustainable.
3. **Verbalise design in a holistic manner.** Apply design principles at all levels and areas of the company. Harness its strategic potential and don't just relegate it to the scope of product or graphic image.

STANDARD 7

DESIGN TO
PROVIDE
MEANING AND
COHERENCE
TO THE OR-
GANISATION

On the path of any organisation towards the establishment of its identity and culture, design can be the element which orders and structures capacities, products and messages that may seem, in many cases, inconsistent or dissimilar, thereby conferring meaning to the whole.

As already mentioned in Standard Two, the use of design as part of the positioning strategy, influencing the brand, confers the organisation with a competitive edge over the competition and a continuous adaptation to a changing and complex environment.

This section explores how design can be a powerful tool to balance meaning and organisational coherence for effective business evolution, changing a series of individual elements into a cohesive and resounding narrative and serving as inspiration for the decisions and actions that the company undertakes.

THE CHALLENGES OF MEANING AND COHERENCE

From time to time, the importance of organisations maintaining coherence and attending to meanings is evinced precisely through a failed design experience. When changes are imposed without adequate reflection on one's own identity, the results become evident.

“In the early 2000s, my father felt that the first booklets were very difficult for children. So he changed them, incorporating a more colourful and child-oriented design. However, this decision led to the loss of brand identity”. (Enrique Rubio. Cuadernos Rubio).

In these cases, an unwarranted intervention evinces how the existing product carried attributes which connected the value proposition with its clients and, when this connection is broken, the design is required to provide a solution.

In this regard, it is worth noting that a brand does not base its success on the aesthetic success of graphic elements such as the logo or colours but, especially, on the ability to establish a chain of meaning between the offer and the expectations of consumers. As an example, Cárnicas Serrano experienced a reorientation in its design, prioritising the brand over the product, which resulted in a disconnection with its clients:

“One of the main reasons why our sales dropped significantly was the lack of recognition. The name was displayed but not the appearance of the product, which was the key to recognition”. (Álex Salvador. Cárnicas Serrano).

This case highlights the delicate balance between coherence in brand identity and the sensory attributes of the product which resonate with the consumer audience.

In contrast, other times it is a prior decision which is questioned in order to seek greater coherence at the present moment, for example when a brand must be projected through multiple channels, both digital and physical.

“We had a logo that was very cool, but when it came to transferring it to the digital environment it didn’t work. It didn’t work on labels either as it was very elaborate”. (Guillermo Lagardera. Zeta Beer).

Bringing meaning and coherence to the organisation is a juggling act which requires thoughtful consideration of the impact of design on client perception and brand identity. Organisations can traverse these challenges using design to effectively create meaning and coherence in their evolution.

CONFER MEANING

In the field of design, generating meaning goes far beyond aesthetic creation; it entails forging a unique identity which resonates both internally and with the target audience.

This process of attributing meaning through design is critical for organisations to distinguish themselves in a saturated market and establish an emotional connection with their audience. The design must not only be visually appealing, but should likewise encapsulate the values, culture and essence of the brand.

“Buyers buy by instinct, as the product has a design that connects. It is essential to integrate design likewise in marketing and sales. It must identify the company and convey something significant”. (Enrique Rubio. Cuadernos Rubio).

A clear example of how design can create meaning is provided by Carmeleta. Since its inception, the company knew that its identity would be associated with the image of the company’s founding woman and Valencian oranges, but likewise to an elegance in design and an international vision. Not surprisingly, its product is defined as ‘*vermouth*’, in English, and not as ‘*vermut*’, as in Spanish.

This commitment to an identity that is neither local nor global, but glocal, is what makes Carmeleta a uniquely exceptional identity in the market.

“I consider that the ability to perfectly represent in an image what Carmeleta is

has been fundamental. I would say that design has been just as important as the quality of the product itself. For me, Carmeleta is 50% product and 50% image”. (Noema Ortí. Carmeleta).

The Valencian Museum of Ethnology L’Etno, for its part, has managed through the incorporation of experiences in its proposals, to generate exhibitions and ways of communicating completely differentiated from other ethnological museums:

“L’Etno’s exhibitions are recognised by the public thanks to their design. They generate expectation for their distinctive and recognisable aesthetics”. (Joan Seguí. L’Etno.)

This case exemplifies how design can be used to create its own and distinct identity, contributing to the European recognition of L’Etno.

Just as design can impact proposal differentiation, so can self-perception. A design imbued with meaning and coherence with the company’s values not only affects the external representation of the brand, but likewise how it is perceived internally, generating security and coherence.

“In redesigning the brand, the first impact we experienced was an increase

in our reliability as a company. When the visual identity is properly aligned, added convenience is experienced and the ability to make a case is significantly increased". (Guillermo Lagardera. Zeta Beer).

Adding meaning through design entails a balancing act of identifying, assigning and effectively communicating the values and essence of a brand, both externally and internally. This practice not only improves market perception, but likewise reinforces identity and trust within the organisation itself.

CONFER COHERENCE

Coherence is essential for organisations seeking to establish a clear and consistent identity. Being consistent reinforces the brand and ensures that the company's message and values are consistently communicated across all contact points. Coherent design is a common thread which unites the organisation/ organisation's strategy, image and practice, creating a unified and meaningful experience for users or clients, personnel and other agents.

"What does the design bring? Most importantly, it has to provide a wealth

of coherence." (Álex Salvador. Cárnicas Serrano).

All aspects of design, from the brand image to the product or user experience, must be aligned and reflect the personality of the organisation. Coherence ensures that the intended meaning is not diluted or distorted.

Navlandis is an example of how design combines strategy, brand and product:

"Our rebranding included a thorough analysis of the company's values and what we wanted to convey. We took advantage of a change in the design of our technology to likewise introduce a change in the design of the brand". (Miguel Navalón. Navlandis).

Another example of harmony between brand and values is represented by Urbàima, manufacturer of vegan footwear. The company focuses on maintaining sustainability as the central element of its brand, thereby relinquishing certain attributes of its sector:

"Everything we produce has to be vegan. Even adhesives have to be vegan, cruelty-free and sustainable. In addition, we avoid any accessories or shapes which

will only be fashionable for a season. We never integrate temporary trends into our designs. Being a 100% vegan company with the highest degree of sustainability is our highest priority". (Maite Navarrete. Urbàanima).

It is important to remember that coherence not only affects the way in which our markets, clients or user audience perceive us, but that it is likewise directly related to the internal integration of the organisation's values by the employees.

"One of the internal mottoes we have is to take care of the design. We work with the different areas of the company to incorporate graphic design elements in their daily work. All personnel like to receive documents which are clear, well-designed and well-structured. In the end, design helps to communicate more effectively, to simplify what you wish to convey and helps maintain greater coherence". (Irene Moreno. Importaco).

This approach demonstrates how aligning consistency in design with brand values can improve personnel communication and experience and reinforce corporate culture.

HOW TO DESIGN TO CONFER MEANING AND COHERENCE?

1. **Focus on having visual and thematic unity.** Prioritise the design to maintain a visual and thematic coherence across all aspects of the brand. This ensures that each element, from logo to product design or user experience, coherently reflects the values and mission of the organisation.
2. **Include design in corporate strategy.** Incorporate design as an essential component in the company's overall strategy. This will align design objectives with broader commercial and cultural objectives, ensuring an attractive aesthetic, while upholding and reinforcing the organisation's vision and values.
3. **Likewise foster coherence in innovation.** Maintain design coherence even when seeking change or innovation. Balance the exploration of new ideas and trends with maintaining the core brand elements which have defined and differentiated the organisation over time.

STANDARD 8

DESIGN TO
INTEGRATE NEW
CHALLENGES,
VISIONS AND
PURPOSES

In a context where social values and challenges are continuously evolving, design emerges as an essential tool to combine strategies, products and services with changing needs.

Many companies are integrating these challenges into their value proposition, while others adopt strategies and redesign their products to effectively address same. There is likewise an increasing number of organisations which are rethinking their objectives, in order to incorporate social and environmental considerations at the centre of their operations and corporate philosophy.

This standard echoes the facilitating role of design as a means of incorporating sustainability into organisations, based on the principle of meeting current needs without compromising those of future generations. In this regard, the design fosters a corporate management which allows for a balance between the protection of the environment, economic growth and social progress.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A VALUE PROPOSITION

Certain organisations stand out for being founded with a clear commitment to sustainability and incorporate this vision into the very core of their mission.

An example of this is the company Urbànimà, dedicated to the design and manufacture of vegan footwear. Since its inception, Urbànimà stands out for its sustainable attitude and animal origin free components. By focusing on local, the brand avoids excess production and promotes responsible consumption:

“Our commitment to the local is steadfast. Every item we use in our design process is carefully selected: from recycled materials to fully recyclable options. And our packaging is plastic-free and recycled”. (Maite Navarrete. Urbànimà).

One of the strategies which differentiate Urbànimà from the set of agents that make up the fast fashion sector are its designs that are long lasting, as these are not based on the trends of each season.

“Our designs are wardrobe staples, basic, versatile and timeless, and always 100% vegan, as this premise is our highest priority”.

In this way the Urbànimà’s offer opposes the inherent obsolescence of the traditional fashion and footwear sector, while maintaining its differentiating ethical stance.

Another example of a sustainable value proposition is the case of Navlandis. Through its innovative design of foldable containers optimising spaces on ships, while offering a solution which contributes to a considerable reduction in the carbon footprint in maritime transport of goods:

“Thanks to the design of the foldable container, we not only optimise space, but similarly reduce CO₂ emissions by avoiding the need to transport four empty containers individually”. (Miguel Navalón. Navlandis).

In the field of sustainability applied to the design and manufacture of industrial machines, Jeanologia is an undisputed success story. This company, specialists in the sustainable dyeing of jeans, has revolutionised the textile sector with its positioning, likewise intended for eco-efficiency. Their solution promises to revolutionise a highly polluting practice such as fashion industry dyeing:

“Since the inception of the company, we adopted the strategic decision to develop technology with the objective of changing our industry towards greater eco-efficiency and sustainability”. (Fernando Cardona. Jeanologia).

To that end, it has replaced harmful manual processes such as sandblasting, which causes silicosis, with laser technology, thereby eliminating health hazards for employees. Furthermore, it has introduced ozone washing machines that reduce water consumption and environmental impact. Through these innovations, Jeanologia exemplifies how sustainability can be constituted as a central value proposition, turning harmful practices into sustainable and efficient solutions.

Of particular note is the case of Hilaturas Ferre, a pioneer company in the production of recycled yarns. The company, founded in a context of a raw material shortage, found in the recycling of textile waste an opportunity to innovate and stay in business. In this way, Hilaturas Ferre was inserting circularity into the basis of its corporate strategy. This redesign of the business model towards “out of necessity” sustainability has become a key strategic advantage for the company’s future.

“It currently enables us to be in a very advantageous position compared to many competitors who are changing or must change. Sustainability in textiles, and in particular the practice of recycling, will experience tremendous growth”. (Luis Pita. Hilaturas Ferre).

These four examples illustrate how design accompanies the creation of value propositions which address the social and environmental challenges of today and tomorrow. Hand in hand with design, innovative companies become agents of change committed to the planet’s great challenges.

ADAPT PRODUCTION TO NEW CHALLENGES

It is important to note that an organisation does not have to be founded with a solid sustainable approach to integrate it over time. Many companies have redesigned their production processes to comply with environmental regulations and growing social expectations, focusing on innovations and strategic changes that ensure a more responsible and efficient activity.

In the case of Erum Group, a manufacturer in the plastics industry specialising in hangers, the company is faced with the challenge of adapting its production to meet the new environmental challenges and the demands of its clients, among which is Inditex. The company has adopted a proactive behaviour to improve the sustainability of its manufacturing process.

“The collaboration with Inditex, one of our main clients, is crucial as it is likewise

committed to a sustainable roadmap. We align ourselves with their standards, complying with all the regulations required of them. We consider this collaboration as an added value that we are offering them". (Miguel Verdú. Erum Group).

In order to address these challenges, the Erum Group has adopted eco-design as a key strategy to improve the sustainability of its manufacturing. The company obtained the eco-design certification not only for the use of recycled materials, but similarly for the comprehensive sustainability of the manufacturing process and for the reparability and recyclability of its products. The Group has established circular economy projects with which it maintains the traceability of its production and ensures its durability in time and uses.

Another example is Neolith, a leading manufacturer of sintered stone surfaces. The company faces several challenges, such as reducing energy consumption and silica handling, a component which poses health risks.

To address these challenges, Neolith has focused its design efforts on the formulation of products which minimise environmental impact. This includes the use of recycled materials and the implementation of production processes that reduce CO₂ emissions:

"In our company we recycle all possible materials and, furthermore, we have designs that are 100% recycled. We are proud to have the Zero Waste certification which specifies that 97% of industrial waste generated in our facilities undergo recycling processes". (David Bueno. Neolith).

Furthermore, Neolith is actively addressing the energy problem by electrifying its gas furnaces which require high temperatures to operate.

The challenge of electrification is likewise taken up by Altadia, a leading ceramic glazes and digital inks manufacturing company:

"We are currently engaged in various projects with the objective of reducing CO₂ emissions by 14% by 2025 from the manufacture of frits and the use of gas and electricity. This effort extends to all the group's facilities, and is not only being implemented locally, but globally". (Begoña Baigorri. Altadia).

Among the noteworthy actions is the implementation of renewable energies, for example, the use of solar panels to power their production processes:

“We are in the process of implementing a solar panels project to use that energy in our production”.

Both Neolith and Altadia’s vision transcends mere emissions reduction; it is a comprehensive interest which permeates every facet of the organisation, from production to resource management and product development.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CHALLENGES: THE CASE OF CAIXA POPULAR

In addition to addressing challenges related to environmental impacts, companies can use design to address other social-related issues, such as accessibility or gender equality. Design thereby enables the integration of the concept of sustainability into organisations in its all-encompassing meaning (environmental, social and economic) and adapts sustainable solutions into competitive strategies.

This is the case of Caixa Popular, a co-operative financial institution which stands out for being oriented towards addressing social challenges through its initiatives and practices. The institution has integrated inclusiveness and social action in the design of its business model, aligning its strategy,

products and services with the emerging demands of society.

Its commitment to accessibility and support for diversity is embodied in the design of actions such as providing support to people with visual or hearing disabilities in its offices.

“We are committed to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. In all offices we offer a video interpretation service in sign language, in a comprehensive manner and during the entire opening hours, without the need for a prior appointment for that service”. (José María Company. Caixa Popular).

Furthermore, Caixa Popular evinces its commitment to social responsibility and community development by actively supporting associations and NGOs:

“We work with the Volunteer Platform of the Valencian Community to continue supporting the association movement and reinforce the role of volunteering”. (José María Company. Caixa Popular).

In line with its purpose of gender equality, Caixa Popular has launched initiatives such as the *Tarjeta Dona* (Donate Card) project, which supports women and promotes equality.

“The *Tarjeta Dona* is the first bank card which promotes gender equality and allocates a percentage of the profits for each purchase to social projects that promote equality between people”.

This model of redistribution of benefits to local associations has been repeated in other Caixa Popular products:

“Currently all our cards are solidarity cards, and the revenue these generate are donated to an association at the end of the year”.

The ethical design of products, services and strategies enables Caixa Popular to address challenges that include accessibility, support for diversity, social responsibility or commitment to gender equality. This is a clear example of how design can act as an ally for organisations to move towards a responsible and sustainable future.

HOW TO DESIGN TO INTEGRATE NEW CHALLENGES, VISIONS AND PURPOSES?

1. **Consider sustainability in the value proposition.** Foster the incorporation of sustainability as a central component of your organisation’s value proposition.

This includes exploring eco-efficient and circular designs and business strategies which echo the commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

2. **Adapt processes and products to new social and environmental challenges.** Foster continuous adaptation in the design of both production processes and products to respond to emerging environmental and social challenges. This entails integrating manufacturing techniques and strategies, materials and uses which minimise environmental impact and promote social innovation.
3. **Contribute to socially responsible management through design.** Further the organisation to use product and service design as a means to address social responsibility. This may include the development of projects that directly address social causes and challenges or which foster partnerships with entities working towards significant social and environmental objectives.

STANDARD 9

DESIGN TO BE
A REFERENCE
BENCHMARK
ORGANISATION

There are organisations which, through their activity, disseminate a design culture to their competitors, clients and suppliers, while there are others that have been influenced in this way. Both situations produce significant changes in the way these organisations behave and perceive themselves.

This standard demonstrates how companies seek inspiration from a variety of sources. These companies do not perceive imitation as a threat, but as an indicator of success and leadership, and strive to build a lasting legacy.

Through these practices, design can convert an organisation into a reference benchmark, fostering innovation and establishing new business models in the industry.

INSPIRATION CAN COME FROM ANYWHERE

In the corporate design and innovation field, inspiration is a valuable resource which can be found in the most unexpected places. The organisations which manage to stand out and become reference benchmarks are those that understand and embrace motivational diversity, from personal experiences to practices developed in other sectors. This openness to diverse influences enables companies to enrich their design

culture, broaden their vision and adapt to a constantly changing market.

The case of Calduch Laboratories perfectly exemplifies how personal experience and exposure to different environments can be a source of inspiration.

“After finishing university, I decided to widen my perspectives and explore opportunities outside of the family business. I was working in a multinational company and this afforded me the opportunity to understand what is essential to succeed in the market”. (Vicente Calduch. Calduch Laboratorios).

This quote highlights the importance of stepping outside one’s comfort zone and avoiding silos of thought to gain a broader, richer perspective.

Influences can likewise be found in similar proposals located in other countries, as well exemplified by the case of L’Etno, the Valencian Museum of Ethnology:

“We were inspired by other museums, such as the Musée d’ethnographie de Neuchâtel (MEN) in Switzerland. The MEN achieves excellence in the stories it tells through its exhibitions “. (Joan Seguí. L’Etno).

This observation underscores how organisations can learn and be assured by international peers and competitors, adopting and adapting successful experiences to their own context.

Clients are often invaluable sources of inspiration. Direct feedback from target audiences enables companies to continuously redefine their products and services.

“The fact that our clients are design studios has made it easier for us to understand the value of a good project. Having as a reference the works that design professionals bring us to print, where we see many things that we like, has afforded us a very useful learning”. (Daniel Matoses. Impresum Imprenta).

Likewise, observation and diversification in different sectors can be an effective strategy for adopting best practices and applying these in new contexts.

“We have specialised in automotive parts, cosmetics and packaging. We have learned from various sectors, which has enabled us to apply design and manufacturing systems in a more versatile manner”. (Miguel Verdú. Erum Group).

Organisations seeking to be leaders in their field should be open to a variety of influences and experiences. Whether through personal practices, observing competitors and colleagues, listening to clients, or exploring other sectors. Inspiration for innovation and design can be found everywhere. This openness not only enriches the design culture within the company, but likewise contributes to build a truly reference benchmark organisation in its field.

IMITATION AS A RECOGNITION OF LEADERSHIP

In the field of design management and use, being an organisation imitated by competition generally denotes leadership and recognition in the market. Far from posing an offensive risk, the fact that one organisation is inspired by another indicates that the latter is setting trends and setting standards in its sector.

Companies that achieve this level of influence succeed in disseminating a design culture to their clients and suppliers, as well as fostering their competitors to adopt innovative practices. The existence of imitation in actions and behaviours demonstrates the impact of an organisation, reaffirming its status as a reference benchmark.

Rolser is aware of its position as a leader in the sector and considers emulation by other companies as a validation of its success and a catalyst for continuous improvement and innovation:

“If they copy us it means that we are a reference benchmark for our competitors. We continuously work on innovating to always be one step ahead and be the inspiration that other companies follow”. (Vicent Server. Rolser).

Zumex also perceives imitation as an indicator of its leadership:

“We are aware that our initiatives are widely copied. However, we consider this to be a sign that we are successful and doing things right”. (José González. Zumex).

This approach evinces a positive attitude towards competition, perceiving it as a stimulus to maintain a high level of innovation and creativity.

Likewise, EBIR Bathroom Lighting exemplifies how its design innovations have been adopted by other companies in its industry:

“For a long time, the wall lamp competition worldwide has been constantly cop-

ying us. They have always been copying what we have released". (Raúl Ribé. EBIR Bathroom Lighting).

Suavinex, in the infant care and maternity sector, has also been a design pioneer, fostering the entire industry to evolve.

"Seeing our commitment to design, major companies began to imitate us. After 25 years, they've all joined in and hired designers. It really has been a competitive advantage for our sector". (Sara Muñoz. Suavinex Group).

This experience underscores how leadership in design can change not just a single company, but an entire industry.

BUILD A LEGACY

Certain organisations not only succeed, but achieve such a significant impact that they become reference benchmarks, inspiring and revolutionising entire sectors. These are organisations which achieve excellence in their field and lay the foundations of a lasting legacy that permeates the competition, clients and suppliers and in the end influences the industry in its environment. This is evident both in innovative products

or services and in business and cultural practices that define new ways of thinking and acting in relation to design and beyond.

Actiu, for example, echoes this legacy idea in its approach:

"The first generation of leaders has created exceptional know-how, and its main purpose has always been to design putting people, their ergonomics, functionality and overall well-being, at the centre. This way of working is shared with the team of collaborators and suppliers, as it is the only way to evolve and grow together under the same philosophy". (Soledat Berbegal. Actiu).

This statement underlines how Actiu's influence exceeds its products, fostering other profiles to adopt similar approaches and assess the human impact of design.

Andreu World is similarly succeeding in fostering the industry to adopt sustainable practices, as has happened with the use of 100% recyclable polyurethane.

"We're interested in extending the sustainability challenge we have taken on as we need others to do so. Doing things right and sharing them is a way to further overall progress through a challenge:

‘We have managed this achievement. Now, can you do it?’”. (Jesús Llinares. Andreu World).

This mindset evinces a commitment to sustainability and challenges other companies to raise their standards.

Another example is that of Caixa Popular, whose cooperative and client-centred model has been the subject matter of study and admiration:

“As a model of success the University of Valencia looked to the bank to write a book through our example of cooperative, Valencian, social, value-based and different banking”. (José María Company. Caixa Popular).

This academic recognition underscores the significant impact the organisation has had on the design and implementation of its cooperative business model.

Organisations that manage to build a legacy in their management go beyond the mere production of goods and services; these become models of inspiration and change. Through their leadership in design and innovation these organisations set new standards and practices which can shape the behaviour of companies in their sector or others. This legacy of knowledge and ex-

perience lives on, not only in their products, but in the lasting influence these have on the industry and the business community in general.

HOW TO DESIGN TO BECOME A REFERENCE BENCHMARK ORGANISATION?

1. **Seek inspiration from a variety of sources.** Being a reference benchmark organisation requires being able to explore a wide range of sources of inspiration, ranging from different sectors to client opinions, to foster creativity and innovation through design.
2. **Accept imitation as a recognition of leadership.** Understand and value imitation as a sign of success and leadership in the market that can prompt the organisation to maintain continuous innovation and set new trends in its own industry or in other sectors.
3. **Focus on creating a sustainable and lasting legacy.** Prioritise the construction of a know-how which survives over time and has a positive impact in economic, social and environmental terms through design practices which transcend the production of products and services.

OTHER RESEARCH FINDINGS

SOME AREAS OF INTEREST FOR CONTEMPLATION

We live in an era wherein it seems appropriate to remember the myth of Prometheus and Pandora. A period of great technological developments which, although they may represent progress in many regards, seem to be accompanied by threatening misfortunes for humanity. A period of progress, as was likewise the Iron Age, nearly three thousand years ago, when Hesiod, in this paradigmatic myth of Classical Antiquity, applauded the benefits of technological humanisation, while warning of the consequences of changing primordial creation (or nature), reshaping the known world and the framework of beliefs and values.

We refer to technology as the ability of human beings to transform our environment, adapting same to our convenience. When this ability is expanded exponentially embodied by designing and planning transformations over time, we call it Design.

Relying on planned transformation is something we can do thanks to the climatic stability we enjoy in the still present geological period, the Holocene, to which we would like to hold on to. These fortunate circumstances and the fact that we are social creatures converts us into the dominant species and has given us ten thousand

years of continuous civilisation. This fact is explained very well by Edward O. Wilson in his book *The Social Conquest of the Earth*.

For more than two thousand years, human beings have been exchanging different products and technologies from one part of the planet to another, from one civilisation to another, from the tip of Asia to our Mediterranean shores. Fifteen centuries after this transportation commenced, only five hundred years ago, with the conquest of America, a process of globalisation across the oceans emerged. Twice a year, the Spanish fleet, made up of approximately one hundred ships transported human beings, manufactured goods, precious metals, animals and plants from one continent to another. Each galleon of the so-called *Carrera de Indias* or the Indies run in English shipped five hundred tonnes of goods, the equivalent of sixteen containers today, which entailed that one thousand six hundred containers were transported on each expedition. Today, many merchant ships transport ten times that amount. The Port of Valencia will transport approximately six million containers this year, the equivalent of approximately 3,650 fleets from that period, ten every day.

In the last two centuries, with the industrial revolution, the world has undergone a radical process of economic, social and

technological transformation. Design contributed to making every new breakthrough development a kind one. By managing aesthetics and playing with styles, conferring to each new object a culturally acceptable appearance, mitigating its newfangledness and contributing to sustain a habitable world. Nevertheless, this dramatic transformation of nature, assumed at first unconsciously as a natural right, and recently felt, with helplessness, as an unstoppable threat, has led us to fearfully believe that we may have ended up changing the climate irreversibly and entered an unknown period, the so-called Anthropocene. An era characterised by the transformation of the world as a result of our waste, especially the invisible wastes, greenhouse gases.

This global awareness, which has occurred in recent decades, has run parallel to the even more accelerated development of new technologies and new materials. This has generated economic opportunities and related geostrategic conflicts. But, above all, it has changed our individual and social habits at a speed which is impossible to assimilate without a sensation of vertigo.

The world has changed so radically and in such a short space of time allowing us to view the new realities with perplexity. While we are seized by the urgent need to implement measures, we have no as-

surances as to which measures are the most appropriate. This sparks profound confusion and distressing irresolution.

We look once again at design, expecting from this creative and projective discipline the same effective capacity to adapt to the new reality that it was able to provide in the industrial revolution and during the productive half of the last century. In a hundred years, the designer who transitioned from having an 'artist-craftsman' profile, to being considered a demiurge and seeing himself/herself as an oracle, an interpreter of the changes to come, to finally being recognised as a technical figure, capable of combining technologies with people's desires. Something always amazing, especially when it works.

It seems urgent to redesign the world to keep it habitable and we all want to be a part of that redesign. Something that seems easy thanks to the tools present on our computer desktops. Cybernetics is possibly the most decisive technological development of our time. It provides us with simple and intuitive software, which makes the inherent design rendering tools available to everyone. Cybernetics develops systems which afford us instant access to information and communication. These advantages lead us to experience a devaluation of knowledge, resulting in

non-differentiation between managing knowledge and having criteria, which can undermine our ability to decide on an opinion and make the appropriate decisions. The illusion has been created that everyone can design. The problem is that the sense of urgency seems contrary to the project idea. A project requires consideration, planning and time for its development. Something that also does not sit well with the political times of democracy, which are rushed between elections. In this context, shortcuts are sought.

The Design Thinking model is presented as a tool to channel the creative process and make same more collaborative, a tool which generates ideas geared towards improvement, but that only goes as far as the project's prelude. The idea is not enough. The project must always be a viable and planned transformation proposal. By the same token, we can see in the development of Artificial Intelligence another very powerful tool to foster creation, for now less collaborative and more parasitic of previous creations, which we hope to be able to use appropriately for the progress of humanity, as we have always done.

In recent decades the world has changed dramatically and with that change what we understand by Design. It is no longer understood in a unitary way and appears

fragmentised into many specialised creative disciplines. Nevertheless, we will only mention Design when creativity is oriented in a planned manner, in a project, to adapt resources and circumstances, in a conscious and responsible manner, to our human convenience.

A pervasive feature of the present moment is fear. It seems that the ancient fear of the Gods has been replaced by fear of ourselves, of our fellow human beings. Fear paralyses us. We have Mother Nature exhausted by technological development and it is still a mystery as to how many more evils may have been released from Pandora's box. In the myth it is said that the only evil which remained inside the box, without escaping, was hope. Seeing hope as an evil seems appropriate if it keeps us irresolute, waiting for things to change on their own, hoping that it will do so without causing too much harm. If we remain idle and wait rather than acting, the world will probably change to our chagrin. Ironically, we need to place hope in human beings and their social nature. Our well-being requires teamwork and our own history as a species demonstrates the success of cooperation and altruism. Fortunately, we are ready and have the means. All it would take is awareness and action.

The participant organisations in this study act, and they do so by using design in a variety of ways, as both a tactical as well as strategic tool, addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, to grow sustainably in a competitive and globalised environment, which requires resolution and planning, creativity and innovation. In this section some of these design-related business experiences are brought together, with the intention of using same, if not as an example, at least as a basis for in-depth contemplation.

In the myth of Prometheus, this Titan is in our corner, stealing inherent technology from the gods for the good of mankind. The manner in which the fire of Olympus was stolen, transported lit inside a hollow stalk of Giant Fennel (*Ferula communis*) is ingenious and sufficiently inventive to have been patented by Prometheus himself. He could have spared himself a terrible punishment and, by extension, the punishment that all of humanity undergoes. The day-to-day running of our companies is a Herculean task. Let's see how design helps to develop such task.

In the previous section the design use standards which contribute significantly to increasing the competitiveness and productivity of organisations and that explain, to a certain degree, the relationship between design and business success, have been identified. These standards have been substantiated through thorough qualitative research in organisations in the Valencian Community. In addition, and inherent to the nature of any exploratory qualitative research, findings have emerged which go beyond the scope of the initial study subject matter, disclosing a range of observations and discoveries.

During the research process and conversations held with managers of companies and organisations, a number of design-related practices and behaviours which may offer valuable information to inspire those seeking to implement effective design strategies have been identified.

These additional findings represent enriching concepts. Subjects such as the evolution of design in family-owned businesses, creation of clusters and the potential of Valencian design have emerged. Issues such as timelessness as a sustainable recognition strategy, the design of spaces, design protection and the relationship between design and science have likewise been addressed.

These are additional insights that not only complement design use standards, but like-

wise provide a broader framework for understanding how design interacts with and affects various areas of an organisation. This demonstrates its ability to influence corporate culture, decision-making and competitiveness in the global marketplace, issues where creativity and innovation are increasingly required.

These findings are presented below with the objective of providing a more holistic understanding of the exceptional scale of design in the competitive corporate environment. And these can serve as a way forward for contemplations which bring to light aspects not addressed in the specific standards.

Design protection

The protection of exploitation rights through design registration represents a key strategy for organisations focused on safeguarding their innovations and consolidating their presence in the competitive market. By obtaining a patent, the company ensures legal protection for its creations and likewise establishes official verification of its originality and creativity. This intellectual property protection process precludes other interested parties from reproducing or exploiting the design without consent, as well as underlining the unique identity and

value of the brand. This is confirmed by the words of the representative of Erum Group, a company specialising in plastic parts (1).

At Navlandis, the decision to file a patent was related to the development of its innovative container, ZBox. After researching and finding significant differences in its design as compared to existing designs, the company understood the importance of protecting their creation. The patent was decisive in the business model, enabling the company to move forward with the security of having a protected product before proceeding with its comprehensive development (2).

For Emuca, the protection of its furniture hardware designs through patents is considered a complex but infallible challenge, especially in a global context where legislations vary significantly. The investment required to do so is considerable given

- (1) “Practically 90% of our designs are patented as we focus on developing products which are innovative and do not copy elements that already exist in the market”. (Miguel Verdú. Erum Group).
- (2) “We developed a unique foldable container solution and proceeded to register it. We decided to ensure that we had industrial protection before embarking on the design development process, as this ensured the security of our investment”. (Miguel Navalón. Navlandis).

the international complexities and legislative differences between regions such as Asia, the United States and Europe (3).

Design protection through patents is a defensive measure to protect intellectual property, but likewise a strategic investment which enhances brand recognition, substantiates its innovative reputation and strengthens its position in a market increasingly based on innovation and differentiation.

Timelessness

Timelessness addressed through durability-oriented design, has become another possible strategy to differentiate and highlight brands with a solid and recognisable identity in sustainability attributes. The choice of materials or the planning of their recovery or the facilitation of their repair or the creation of an emotional bond between people and objects, are formulas which are proposed by design to achieve a responsible perspective opposed to ephemeral trends and rapid obsolescence.

- (3) “Ensuring design protection, whether through global, European or national patents, is a fascinating and, at the same time, complex challenge. However, we consider it essential to underpin a good design with a patent to ensure its adequate protection”. (Santiago Palop. Emuca).

A clear example of this strategy is that used by the company Sanycces, which has adopted timelessness as an essential part of its brand recognition. Its philosophy focuses on designing bathroom equipment with a distinguished style that avoids stridency (4).

This commitment has consolidated the Sanycces identity with very clear and defined attributes. Furthermore, the brand's commitment to its long-lasting products contributes to the penetration of the culture of sustainability in society and its association with the company's values (5).

- (4) “We look for pieces that are elegant. We're interested in finding elements with a subtle point of interest, which do not strike the eye too much, but which convey peace and tranquillity. We want products which facilitate harmonious integration with any environment and that combine well with various styles”. (Blanca Serrano. Sanycces).
- (5) “We believe in creating products that last, fostering the idea of investing in materials and shapes which will remain in mint condition over time, that will age well. Our products stand out for their quality and the constant availability of spare parts. We are seeing a change of mentality in the new generations, moving away from the idea of continuously changing things for something new”. (Blanca Serrano. Sanycces).

Urbàanima, a vegan and sustainable fashion brand, is another example that has made timelessness the cornerstone of all its products and this is embodied in key product design decisions, such as the choice of colours or shapes (6).

Brands committed to sustainable production use design to ensure the durability of their products, strengthening their identity and contributing to a more responsible economy.

Prospective design

Recognising the decisive role of design in the formulation of corporate identity and competitive strategy is a characteristic feature of organisations that go beyond considering design simply as a tool to address current problems. For these companies, design represents an investment in the future (7).

- (6) “In terms of design, we have opted for timeless models which become wardrobe staples. Since trends are constantly changing and keeping up with fashion year-in, year-out would entail purchasing new shoes frequently, we focus on designs that last over time. This choice underpins our commitment to sustainability by offering more durable and versatile footwear”. (Maite Navarrete. Urbàanima).
- (7) “We have a great responsibility as the future is tied to every action we perform. We under-

In the case of Rolser, design acquires a forward-looking importance by outlining the future lines of product development. It is incorporated at the highest echelons of the company, closely related to management to ensure its complete incorporation into long-term planning and strategy (8).

Unlike what happens at Rolser, in the business environment, design is usually part of already created areas or departments such as sales, marketing or communication, as well as in the technical office or in the R&D+i department. This can lead to a limited and determining perception of the strategic scope of design. Nevertheless, the most successful organisations recognise design as a transversal element capable of adding value to all areas of the company. This design integration facilitates a greater capacity to make proposals and ensures a more effective fit with the overall planning of the organisation.

stand design as the tool which enables us to address many problems in a responsible manner, helping people in the environment where they live today, tomorrow and the day after". (Soledat Berbegal. Actiu).

(8) "We set up the design department 25 years ago. It focuses mainly on analysing trends and conceiving the designs that we will develop for the coming year". (Vicent Server. Rolser).

Sanycces exemplifies how design can play a value-unifying role in overall corporate management by incorporating same into its central strategic priority (9).

The increasing number of companies which adopt this perspective, placing design at the core of their management, evinces the progressive maturity of design in the business environment and demonstrates its ability to be a catalyst for differentiation, long-term success and innovation.

Connections to science

A dual connection between design and science can be pinpointed. This alliance is embodied, on the one hand, in tangible action which is discernible in the creation of innovative products. And on the other, design and science share a common methodological foundation, as both disciplines focus on creative problem solving, through a methodology, to find innovative solutions.

(9) "It is essential to have a professional design profile within the company that has a comprehensive understanding of positioning, production, visual identity, brand language and product strategy. It requires someone who understands all these aspects and aligns these naturally". (Blanca Serrano. Sanycces).

If we concentrate on the integration of design into the scientific research process in organisations, it is evident that this synergy enables scientific knowledge to be transformed into concrete and practical results, ensuring that the benefits of science reach a wider audience.

Inesfly Corporation is a technology company specialising in the creation of paints and coatings for the insect vector control of endemic diseases. Originally set up as a varnish company for the furniture sector, it has evolved into a company with its own patented technology. Its disruptive work has enabled the company to develop innovative product designs which effectively and safely address health issues.

Generational change

Family-owned organisations have a categorical weight in the business ecosystem of the Valencian Community and represent a conducive environment for the study of design. In many of these companies, generational transition is often a challenge as it entails complex family and business dynamics. Faced with the challenge of business transition, the new generations find in the culture of design a motivation to revitalise the inherited legacy, updating products and services.

Calduch Laboratorios, with a history spanning more than a century, exemplifies this transformation process. Initially, the Calduch family created Suavina, a lip balm intended for those working in agriculture, without any significant interest in its design. The following generation challenged traditional practices and revitalised Suavina through a redesign which updated its packaging and brand, while respecting core values. This change proved to be successful, attracting new international clients, boosting sales and leading to the industrialisation of the production process. Today, Suavina is an internationally successful and profitable product, embodying a promising future (10).

Another case of generational change is Impresum, a printing company which emerged from the restructuring of a family-owned business, which underwent a significant transformation in a context of technological change. When the suc-

(10) “My father and grandfather maintained the production and marketing of the product. They considered that if they sold the same units as the previous year, it was fine. When I joined the pharmacy, I set out to unlock the company’s highest potential. I applied for a loan to acquire new molds and undertook the entire product and brand redesign process”. (Vicente Calduch. Calduch Laboratorios).

cessor joined his father's business, he incorporated design into the business strategy and adapted the company to new technologies to make the printing house more transparent and differentiate itself from the competition, achieving brand recognition in the process (11).

Succession in family-owned businesses must ensure their evolution, relevance and competitiveness in a constantly changing world. The commitment to design in this change and its use as a sign of the times accompanies the new generations as they take on leadership and decision-making roles, thereby setting the tone in management. This enables the implementation of emerging aspects and technologies to adapt to current trends and the contemporary needs of the company's target audience.

- (11) “With my joining, we started to question practices which were previously the credo and we faced changes motivated at the same time by a technological paradigm transformation. We're still here because we have known how to adapt, as a family printing company with a team of nine people, a size that distinguishes us in the European market, where there is a predominance of large or very small printing companies”. (Dani Matoses. Impresum Imprinta).

Geographic clustering

The emergence of new technologies, as well as the evolution of traditional technologies, requires intelligent management to adapt these to our needs and take advantage thereof for the benefit of corporate competitiveness. The concurrence of companies which can share knowledge and resources in a small geographical area often generates very positive synergies. These collaborations can be expanded through design, which, in turn, becomes a resource of intellectual capital transferable as experience.

Design, rooted in local culture and history, materialises geographically by helping to build innovation clusters in specific sectors. These clusters not only reflect regional identity, but likewise foster an environment in which companies and professionals sustain and strengthen each other. Thereby becoming dynamic ecosystems where techniques, relationships and professional skills are shared to foster collective and sustained growth (12).

- (12) “In the Valencian Community we are fortunate to have high-profile companies with strong ties to design. For example, we have the ceramics cluster in Castellon and the plastic injection material cluster in Alicante. The experiences which are generated and passed on

The Castellon ceramics cluster includes companies such as Neolith, Altadia and Tejas Borja, which take advantage of specific technology and intrinsic ceramic knowledge unique to the region (13).

At Tejas Borja the company recognises the positive impact of having a ceramic ecosystem in Castellon. The geographical proximity has conferred the company an opportunity to learn about and adapt technologies which have enabled the development of innovative products in their category (14).

Furthermore, the notable concentration of knowledge and skills in

from one to the other always provide enriching backgrounds and ideas". (Santiago Palop. Emuca).

(13) "It is very difficult for other companies to match the quality of our design. There are details and ins and outs in the production process that are closely related to the ceramic knowledge found here". (David Bueno. Neolith).

(14) "We have always had the advantage of being near to Castellon, which has guided us. When we required the development of a tile-specific printer, we turned to nearby printer manufacturers to state our intention. At first, we weren't taken very seriously, but together with the technical team we have, we made progress and in the end we managed to design the right printer". (Andrés Casanova. Tejas Borja).

the ceramics sector in Castellon entails that companies such as Altadia bring benefits to the area (15).

In addition to Castellon, another area of the Community with a self-reinforcing and value-generating sectoral cluster is that of the toy and plastic injection cluster in Alicante, recognised for its tradition. Actiu underlines the advantage this represents and how it has fostered its commitment to maintaining production and design in this region (16).

These clusters of companies have proven their worth in terms of design, productivity and innovation. The geographical proximity of companies specialising in a specific sector not only fosters

(15) "In our company we manufacture frits, glazes, colours and inks for the ceramics industry. To demonstrate the various applications of these materials to our clients, we chose to display these on finished tiles, produced in the area. This decision strengthened the relationship with our clients worldwide". (Begoña Baigorri. Altadia).

(16) "Why should we manufacture outside Spain? It makes no sense, since in this same area, there are companies and people who have worked for more than 100 years in plastic injection or sewing, sectors that we incorporate in our production. Our commitment is not to compete on price but rather innovation and quality". (Soledad Berbegal. Actiu).

collaboration and knowledge sharing, but likewise facilitates growth and can be a powerful engine for economic development and design excellence.

Valencian talent

Due to the characteristics and needs of numerous organisations in the Valencian Community, geared towards the production of consumer goods or services, a strong design sector has developed, sustained by highly qualified professionals. There are professionals who work as part of organisations in diverse industrial sectors, while others work in design studios and agencies.

The abundance of Valencian design professionals with high national and international recognition and prestige is notable. This phenomenon has quite a lot to do with the quality of the training provided in the numerous design schools in our territory. The development of the profession has likewise been furthered by the existence of the Association of Designers of the Valencian Community (ADCV), which has been responsible for promoting design and defending the profession for four decades, thereby fostering the dynamization, cohesion and structuring of the professional sector. This set of factors, evidence of a design culture which is extensively

widespread throughout the territory, was a determining factor in the designation of Valencia as World Design Capital.

Given this context, it is understandable that among companies and organisations in the Valencian Community there is a marked inclination to collaborate with local design studios. This preference is not merely a matter of geographical convenience, but an expression of strong grassroots and confidence in the skill, quality and creativity that Valencian designers bring to their projects.

These organisations considerably value the cultural and physical proximity to the region's studios, which results in a more fluid and effective communication, a better understanding of specific business needs and the development of customised solutions which perfectly fall under and are suitable to their business objectives. Design professionals and studios that have contributed to this vibrant and diverse design landscape were mentioned several occasions during the research.

The design services offer in the Valencian Community has historically demonstrated its positive impact on the territory's organisations as one of the sources of added value creation capable of increasing productivity and generating competitive advantages. This collaboration between companies and local design profession-

als has fostered the consolidation of the local sector, which has managed to position itself internationally. At the same time, this synergy furthers region's economic growth and cements the good reputation of the Community as a hub of innovation and excellence in design worldwide.

Professional prestige

Organisations pursue the objective that both their brand and their offer are distinctive and recognised in the market. One of the options to achieve this is to work with renowned design professionals. Turning to a 'professional guru' is one way of seeking the significant impact that a recognised design profile can have on a company. Although we have not been able to validate this as a specific design use standard in this research, this pattern is recognisable in some of the organisations interviewed. The presence of design professionals with personality and renown can bring recognition and steer or redirect corporate objectives.

One company where this standard is evident is Vondom which, since its inception, has worked with prestigious names in national and international design. By using the media visibility of these collaborations as a positioning strategy, the company has managed to not only quickly gain global pres-

tige, but likewise to take advantage of these associations to incorporate valuable design knowledge from renowned profiles (17).

Organisations can likewise use design professionals with extensive experience and knowledge in a specific market segment or which resonate with their original brand values. This is the case of Urbànimà, which relied heavily on the professional and specialised sustainable footwear design background of an expert designer. The designer's influence was decisive in the design but similarly in the overall direction of the business model (18).

The designer's profile, committed to circularity and responsible consumption, resonated deeply with the philosophy of the vegan brand and, in addition to prod-

(17) "In 2010 we initiated a collaboration with a renowned American designer who had won hundreds of international awards and is considered one of the greats of design. We produced a significant number of his proposals, which garnered significant attention from international specialist design media. This yielded considerable recognition and visibility". (Pedro Llinares. Vondom).

(18) "Having a specialised designer was absolutely essential. I personally had no experience in the sector and needed someone to guide me. I learned a lot from the designer. The designer was key because he/she grasped the concept immediately". (Maite Navarrete. Urbànimà).

uct design, contributed to the selection of sustainable suppliers and materials.

These cases substantiate how a significant figure can be a catalyst for change and innovation in a company. Whether it is through his/her vision and reputation or his/her values and experience, the designer brings inestimable value to the company capable of prompting that company into new directions and open up new possibilities in the market, marking a before and after in its trajectory.

Entrepreneurship through design

The “Entrepreneur Designer” concept encapsulates the idea that design can be the main engine for starting a business. This vision is based on the belief and passion of those who design a product or service, leading these to pursue ways to produce and develop design as their main livelihood. Although this finding has not been substantiated at the standard level, it has been identified in some of the companies in the study.

An example of this is the Media Vaca publishing house, which stands out for its unique approach to the publication of illustrated books. Its founder does not call himself a designer or entrepreneur in the traditional sense, but rather his career

has been autodidactic, characterised by a personal exploration of the world of illustration and publishing. The publishing house has focused on collaborating with professional illustrators and authors to create books which are true works of art, with a strong emphasis on content and design, and has been recognised for its innovative approach and for challenging publishing market conventions (19).

Thanks to this approach, Media Vaca stands out as a unique publishing house in the industry. This is embodied not only in the works it produces, but similarly in its solid commitment to ethics and excellence in publishing field, aspects that are contemplated in its detailed manual of good practices.

Elsewhere, Carmeleta, a craft liquor company, has integrated design into its essence from the very beginning. Its

(19) “We started producing books with illustrators who had no work in this country. We gave them carte blanche to think about their own projects. Furthermore, we similarly think about our own projects. Most of the books we produce are ideas that we have and that we share with illustrators who might be interested in working in that direction. I believe that what defines our project is that the books we produce are the books we want to produce”. (Vicente Ferrer. Media Vaca).

founder, an interior designer, has always been aware of the importance of design in the presentation and perception of the company's products, connecting it to her own family history (20).

This relationship can be discerned from the packaging to the brand image, an attention to detail that has been key in Carmeleta's positioning in the market, where its products are appreciated both for their quality as well as their distinctive aesthetics.

Media Vaca and Carmeleta are examples which substantiate how design can be the impetus for entrepreneurship, demonstrating that when designers strongly believe in their vision and product, can create successful businesses which embody their values and creative abilities.

Influence on behaviours

The attribution to the designer of being a demiurge, oracle or medium between the interests of the company and the de-

(20) "Carmeleta was precisely my paternal grandmother. There is a very powerful union between my story, our product and the design, precisely because I am an interior designer. I just created something that came from my family history. From my grandmother in this case". (Noema Ortí. Carmeleta).

sires of people makes even more sense when reference is made to an organisation geared towards the provision of services.

User experience (UX) design defines how we interact and respond to technology, significantly influencing our behaviours and decisions, disclosing itself as a powerful tool capable of guiding human behaviour.

The case of Zeus Smart Visual Data exemplifies this. The company is dedicated to creating visually attractive data panels which facilitate corporate decision-making. Through the design of the data, the behaviours of those who interpret that data are guided (21).

The fostering of positive behaviours is an action that at Zeus is undertaken through design. For example, by displaying data in a way that does not shame lower-performing employees but motivates those persons to improve. Design here acts as a psychological and motivational tool which can positively influence a team's behaviour (22).

(21) "You can change a CEO's mood with an alert on a panel. Putting a blinking red number induces changes, even if it is very positive data. The design of data presentation can influence how it is perceived". (Paula Mármol. Zeus Smart Visual Data).

(22) "When our client asks how can I increase the performance of less productive personnel? We know that it is necessary to motivate the

User experience design is a formidable tool with a considerable impact on the way we perceive and react to information and technology, significantly influencing our behaviours and decisions. Beyond its aesthetic role, design has the power to guide, motivate, and sometimes manipulate our actions and perceptions. Its responsible use is essential to foster positive changes and avoid undesirable consequences, such as addictive behaviours or misinformed decisions. Therefore, the adoption of professional ethics in digital design is paramount, ensuring that its influence on human behaviour is ethical and constructive.

Design in spaces

Geared towards user experience, design transcends its best known applications, such as product design or branding, to become an essential tool in the creation of impressive and memorable spaces. Several companies have recognised this potential and have integrated same as a distinctive element or even as the core of their business model.

employee, and this means not placing him/her at the bottom of a classification. We must contemplate on how to design the presentation of data to obtain the desired results". (Paula Mármol. Zeus Smart Visual Data).

Caixa Popular has redesigned its offices to improve interaction with customers. This new design, where all materials are sustainable, significantly improves the customer experience and service efficiency (23).

In the case of L'Etno, the design of exhibitions, activities and its communication has been fundamental for its recognition as the best European museum in 2023. The use of the design undertaken to improve the presentation and dissemination of its cultural legacy has been essential in this achievement, highlighting its role in creating unforgettable and memorable experiences (24).

At Acierta Retail, space design plays a decisive role in its strategy, especially when it comes to creating unique environments for fashion collections. The

(23) "The new offices evince an innovative relationship model for both the client and the work team. Having a multipurpose reception area which can host events and presentations, and convey the trust, simplicity and transparency of the institution's character". (José María Company. Caixa Popular).

(24) "The distinction we have received is due to the way in which we have managed to effectively communicate our message to the public. Our museography design, the experience provided and the unique way in which we tell our stories have been recognised". (Joan Seguí. L'Etno).

company stands out for its ability to adapt design to each specific context, responding to the needs of its clients, which include brands such as Tous or Dior.

Furthermore, the furniture manufacturing company Actiu underscores how an appropriate design of workspaces can positively influence well-being. This is embodied in the search for comfort, ergonomics and the prevention of health problems, evidencing the function of design as a means to improve the work environment (25).

The design of spaces is positioned as a transformative force in the corporate world to satisfy specific needs. On the one hand, its ability to create unique and memorable environments makes it an essential component for success and differentiation in the market. And on the other, its relevance in the work environment stands out, where its integration into working conditions to achieve well-being, including aspects such as safety, hygiene, ergonomics or sustainability, can foster business productivity.

(25) “Design enables us to address problems and improve people’s lives, work and habitat in a relevant manner. Beyond the aesthetic and functional, design is defined by its ability to serve people and contribute to their well-being “. (Soledat Berbegal. Actiu).

Emerging practices

Design, in addition to transforming products and services, is giving rise to new professional practices and work areas. These emerging practices materialise in response to the specific challenges and demands of the contemporary market. As design extends beyond its traditional boundaries, opportunities for innovation and specialisation in previously unexplored or underdeveloped niches open up.

We have seen earlier the case of Zeus Smart Visual Data, in which UX design and data visualisation specialisation have become essential disciplines for the interpretation and effective presentation of data, facilitating decision making.

For its part, Jeanologia believes that in design there are opportunities for new professional practices which adapt to the trends and needs of society. Although these recognise that certain specialisations are not yet taught in schools, these substantiate that design continually generates innovative profiles (26).

(26) “In our department we are garment finishing developers, a non-existent profession in schools. New professions are being created in design. For example, before there were no laser designers, now there are”. (Fernando Cardona. Jeanologia).

At Jeanologia, the garment finishing development profession is emerging, an area which merges textile engineering, graphic design, fashion design and chemistry. This preparation responds to the new requirements of the fashion sector. The same company is taking the initiative to train these unique profiles, filling an important educational vacuum.

Organisations increasingly require specialised and flexible profiles, capable of providing value and solutions to contemporary challenges, which in turn furthers the development of new areas of study and practices in design. We are witnessing a transformation in which design not only responds to current needs, but likewise creates and defines new career opportunities.

There is no single organisation like another. Accordingly, the design-related experiences in each organisation are very different. Few regions in the world will have a greater diversity of sectors and company types than the Valencian Community.

Through fragments of interviews held with managers of various companies, we have reviewed a good number of subject matters which invite contemplation on the real use of design in the corporate world.

We have seen how, that by seeking competitive differentiation through design, that

products with sufficient inventiveness to be patented and likewise secure a dominant market position can be developed. Or how sometimes the strategy does not entail innovation or differentiation, but rather taking advantage of the powers of design to confer new products a timeless character. And that design likewise helps scientific or technical developments to be clearly demonstrated to society, transformed into practical and affordable solutions.

We have seen how design is used as a sign of the times, accompanying the adaptation of a company at a time of generational change. And how the renewal of the people responsible for management has entailed a gradual integration of design in organisations as a regular resource, with their own personnel, even in a specific department, or outsourcing the service based on requirements.

We have noted that, when hiring design services, Valencian companies opt for local professionals, who possess great prestige beyond the Valencian area. Taking advantage of the visibility of the design professional entails resorting to profiles with high media exposure or specialists in a certain field to achieve recognition. The communication of interest in design within the same sector or a small geographical area is likewise common.

We have noted how certain new professions related to design or fostered by the technological progress that it brings have been incorporated into organisations. The development of UX-Design for the design of user experiences is particularly noteworthy, which can change behaviours and the assessment of the services rendered. By the same token, the power of design in the conditioning of spaces is recognised, to the point that these determine our habits, our health and change our perception.

Therefore, in this section we have compiled these research findings on design use standards in organisations. Our purpose is to motivate the people responsible for these and design professionals to contemplate and discuss the role of design in this historical moment.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of this study, undertaken on a selection of organisations in the Valencian Community from diverse economic activities, provides a roadmap on how design is actually implemented in business management. This relevance of the research lies herein. Identifying the nine design use standards and ascertainment of inspirational insights offer real opportunities for companies to benefit from the powers of design and successfully attain their objectives.

For several years, the analysis of the relationship between companies and design which has been undertaken by the Design Impact Observatory, *Oid!* (its acronym in Spanish), has had the objective of compiling data to convert same into useful tools which increase productivity in the Valencian corporate ecosystem. With this research we have taken a further step. It has been possible to define and understand, in greater degree, the tactical and strategic uses of design in organisations, as well as the results these generate.

The thorough approach, on a small scale and with information obtained first-hand, has been essential to discern the direct correlation between the decisions in which design intervenes and its effects on organisations. It has likewise rendered it possible to know the day-to-day requirements that entrepreneurs face.

Each of the stories shared by each organisation is unique in itself. A heterogeneous set of diverse actions to attain different objectives in various types of companies. But related to each other through the use of design. Hence, a wide spectrum of utilities is configured which evinces the multiple design possibilities in the management of organisations and, most interestingly, these serve as guidance for specific uses.

Viewing success from a design perspective entails embracing the complexity and uniqueness of each organisation to generate value. Design use standards, as if they were sustenance, considerably strengthen the growth of organisations and confer these with the vitality required to thrive in the business environment.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that success is not guaranteed just by having design as the sole livelihood of the company. Design must be complemented by other elements of sustenance and integrated into a conscious and coherent business context, aligned with the value proposition, so that organisations grow and prosper completely.

Publisher

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Printing

La imprenta CG

Financed by

Valencian Innovation Agency. (Regional
Government of Valencia)

*“Nine standards of design use in
organisations”* is a research developed
within the framework of the [Oid! Design
Impact Observatory](#), a ADCV project.

D.L.: V-405-2024

ISBN: 978-84-09-58361-4

